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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

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**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 28 February 2017

Mardi 28 février 2017



**Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac**

**Président
L'honorable Dave Levac**

**Clerk
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 28 February 2017

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 28 février 2017

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MODERNIZING ONTARIO'S MUNICIPAL LEGISLATION ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 SUR LA MODERNISATION DE LA LÉGISLATION MUNICIPALE ONTARIENNE

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 23, 2017, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 68, An Act to amend various Acts in relation to municipalities / Projet de loi 68, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne les municipalités.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's always an honour and a privilege to stand and bring words on behalf of the good people of Algoma-Manitoulin, particularly this morning on Bill 68, the Modernizing Ontario's Municipal Legislation Act. One of the things that our member from Windsor-Tecumseh, who spoke to this, says: "Where is the beef in this bill?" I'll be trying to touch on some of that with my comments.

What I want to do, through my brief amount of time that I have here this morning, is try to put a flavour to it from a northern perspective. Although municipalities and governments are on the front line every day serving and helping Ontarians with their daily lives, they don't all work with the same realities. Those are facts from northern Ontario and in many small communities in rural Ontario.

Communities in my riding of Algoma-Manitoulin and the rest of northern Ontario definitely don't require the same for their municipalities as Torontonians do. Maybe we don't have streetcars or subway lines in Wawa or maybe we don't have six million people living in the greater Blind River area, but we have families, we have businesses, we have communities and we have services that need to be tended to. That doesn't mean that northern municipalities need less from our Ontario's government; it simply means that those municipalities have different needs.

As my colleague from Windsor-Tecumseh mentioned many times in his comments when we were last debating this bill, a large part of this bill is a lot of housekeeping.

We understand that from time to time we do need to update and modernize legislation, and that's how we do things in this province. Like my colleague said, a good portion of this bill is about tying up loose ends, and that's good. However, the real problem about this bill is not what it does; it's about what it doesn't do.

Municipalities across the province have to deal with an increasing fiscal gap, a lack of revenue tools and a constant download of responsibility from this provincial government. The real problem with this bill is that we pretend to be blind to those realities in order to make it easier when we are talking about modernizing our province's municipal laws. If we are going to do housekeeping and open the discussion about modernizing and improving our municipal laws, let's actually address the broader issues. They aren't new issues. They've been coming to this table, and we've been hearing from municipal leaders time and time again, so they're not new. We just really need to roll up our sleeves and tackle them. I've heard about these problems from municipalities all over my riding as well as from organizations like the Ontario Good Roads Association and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario.

First, let's talk about the most obvious problem: the fiscal gap. Last year's budget was not adequately addressing the growing problem for so many municipalities. Actually, the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund, the main provincial funding source for smaller municipalities, had its budget reduced again. Of course, the provincial government justified itself by saying that it's uploading the costs of certain services like social assistance, ODSP and courtroom security.

But what's not fair is that the larger communities are benefiting far more from the uploading and responsibilities. Those are some of the realities that many municipalities across northern Ontario and rural areas are facing. They're not asking for anything more, but they certainly want to have something that is fair, recognizing the challenges that are there for northern municipalities, and the fact that there are greater challenges that are there in access to capacity, access to technical engineering when it is required, and the cost of that specialty that you need to bring to northern municipalities. Most of the time, we don't have those in our backyards. Those individuals and those resources and that capacity are sitting in southern Ontario. It takes a huge investment in order to bring them up to northern Ontario.

In our construction season, our projects are delayed because of the challenges that are there. Mother Nature doesn't always co-operate in construction season.

The costs in smaller communities are far less, but the cuts in the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund hit them a lot harder. Losing \$50,000 from the partnership fund with a bigger municipality means a lot less than in a small municipality in northern Ontario—about 1,000 to 5,000 people. That's a big impact on them. We need to recognize that in some of the discussions we're having.

The problem is that rural and northern communities need that money. I'm all for government uploads and more responsibility, but not at a cost of cutting into the budget of small communities that were counting on that money to balance their finances. Again, not all communities have the same needs. Property taxes are not enough to keep small, northern communities afloat.

A lot of the communities across northern Ontario—and I raised this with the Premier just before the Christmas break, the impact that MPAC is having on their communities. Some of these communities in northern Ontario are looking at a 318% increase on their MPAC assessments. The formula and the information they are using by making an adjustment on assessments on industry, shifting that over to residential properties, is a huge impact on those municipalities, because now they're going to have to make an adjustment: "Do we raise our taxes? And if we do, what does that mean?" Those are a lot of the challenges that we have.

I was very disappointed with the response that I got, because I did get a commitment from the Premier here in the House during question period that she would actually take the time to look at the MPAC assessments. The response that I received was, "You're right"—sorry, she didn't say I was right, but she did say that she was looking into it, and shifted it over to the Minister of Finance. Not getting a response from the Minister of Finance, I followed up with him, asking for a response. Stating the obvious in a response was really a slap in the face to a lot of the municipalities in northern Ontario that were looking towards this government for actually putting a focus on MPAC and what was going on. But they didn't, and we still look at farming—farmers are being affected by this, and are being targeted in our area. Northern communities are being targeted by MPAC, by their assessments. A lot of people are hurting right now.

0910

Today, we're talking about Bill 68, and I'll be touching on those impacts of MPAC, hydro costs, and what it means for the struggles and the pressures that are being put on our municipalities. They're having to challenge themselves: Am I going to be able to keep my arena open? Will I be able to provide that service to my community, and if I shut it down, will I lose anybody in my community? Will we lose that revenue coming in from surrounding communities? I'll come back to that in a bit, Mr. Speaker.

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario noted that for almost half of Ontario's municipal governments, a 1% property tax increase raises just \$50,000—only \$50,000, that's it; not only an increase far from enough to compensate for the fiscal gap, but still an increase forced upon families who just can't afford it.

The Rural Ontario Municipality Association and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario both asked the Ontario government for an increase of \$11 million for the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund. That was just to reflect inflation. Well, unfortunately the government refused to meet the requests of municipalities.

Funding is necessary and essential for the good of municipalities across our province, but the government doesn't seem to want to talk about it. If this is not the right time to discuss the problem, I'm not sure when it's going to be a good time to discuss that problem.

I want to go back to the struggles of the municipalities in my area, on the North Shore. I have one community where they have just built a beautiful school in order to bring in—well, I shouldn't say "just built." They have added in a new portion, an elementary portion to the high school. They have a great arena there. We're going to be meeting up—Andrea, our leader, and myself—with the mayors in the area, and we're going to be talking about some of those challenges that those mayors are facing by keeping their infrastructure open, because of the added burdens of cost, because of the lack of revenue tools, because of the high hydro costs that have really put them in a very tough position to maintaining that infrastructure and keeping that open.

That one arena is not just for that one community; it feeds in from Sault Ste. Marie because of the cheaper ice times. There are a lot of junior hockey teams that come out to that area, which supplements some of that revenue for the community. There are other communities that tie into that area, and Desbarats as well, that use that arena. Unfortunately, they're going to be put into the position: What do we do? What is best for our community as well?

Essentially, the government is downloading responsibilities, along with the problem of balancing the budget. Rural and northern communities don't have the same resources that the Ontario government does. Instead of diffusing the costs to help smaller communities by refunding the provincial program, we put the burden on the shoulders of hard-working rural and northern Ontario families who already pay too much.

In my riding of Algoma-Manitoulin, towns are small and sometimes isolated. That means they have to do more with less. This bill won't fix the situation and won't help with what is actually happening in the communities around Ontario.

Bill 68 won't fix financial gaps, and the government doesn't seem to want to listen to what's really going on. The government should have committed to doing public hearings across the province in order to listen to the concerns of municipal leaders and the concerns of citizens. The government should have held a proper review so we could pinpoint similar problems and find flexible solutions for a bigger number of northern and rural municipalities.

The need for modernizing municipal legislation is a real one, but we need to address what's being actually demanded in large numbers. New revenue tools for municipalities has been on the ask for a very long time.

It's a demand I've been hearing for a while from towns, big and small. Property tax is not enough to pay for what is demanded by municipalities anymore.

The provincial government has not only downloaded responsibilities to municipal governments—which they will need to pay—but the provincial government has also defunded the programs to help municipalities pay. On top of that, this government wants us to modernize municipal legislation without considering new revenue tools for municipalities.

Please don't tell me that I'm the only one seeing the irony in that, because that's what municipalities have been asking for.

Rural and northern communities can't pay if they don't have new tools, and if they can't pay, that means taxpayers will have to pick up the tab. It's already hard enough for some families to make it through the month and ask municipalities to go year by year. With hydro bills hitting people living in rural and northern Ontario harder than in the rest of the province—and that's a fact—I'd think this government would reconsider—would think about putting a bigger burden on their shoulders.

People living up north make this province more vibrant and beautiful. We don't want everybody to move out of northern Ontario to southern Ontario because, frankly, what kind of Ontario would we have? We love living in the north. That's our Ontario.

Just this weekend I watched Team McCarville, from Thunder Bay, who proudly represented northern Ontario at the Scotties. We have our Olympic champion who is going to be going, Team Jacobs, from Sault Ste. Marie.

That's what we have in northern Ontario: We have champions that are there. But we want to be able to champion our cause as well. We need a partner on those ices. We need the government to come to the table. I come from northern Ontario, and I wouldn't want to live anywhere else. Give municipalities the tools they're looking for so that they can champion their causes and what they're looking for.

I say this on behalf of everyone across my riding of Algoma-Manitoulin but also on behalf of every northerner: We need to make sure that life stays affordable in the north. To stay vibrant, northern communities need young families, but if all we have to offer up north are higher hydro rates and higher property taxes, with shrinking municipal and provincial services, how can we expect the people to settle in and find a home in northern Ontario?

I don't want to get started on the transportation and roads issues we have in northern Ontario. I had another issue just last week where, once again, the Trans-Canada Highway was shut down. It was shut down for eight hours. That's a regular. We had communities that couldn't get to work. We had kids that couldn't get to school. We had product that was sitting for a lengthy period of time on the roads. We had industry that was being affected. That's another discussion for another day, but it's also a fact that we face in northern Ontario.

Again, we're not asking for more. We're asking for what is fair, and we certainly deserve what is rightfully entitled to us.

To be clear, less people means less money, leading to—you guessed it—less services, leading to even less people settling in northern Ontario. It's a vicious circle, and we can break it right now.

Not only do we need to work with municipalities to make sure that we find the right funding level, adapted to the different regions and needs of this province, but we also need to make sure we give them the tools they need to do what is expected from them. Because municipalities don't have all the same realities, we should be looking into different ways to help them tackle their financial problems. We need different options to respond to different needs.

Let me give you an example, in the short period of time that I have left. For example, a hotel tax would greatly benefit larger cities but could kill a small northern community that might count on tourism to boost its revenues. That's just a fact.

Municipal leaders have ideas to make this province better and to ensure that their communities flourish, but we need to listen to them and give them the tools they need to succeed. Wishful thinking won't be enough.

Not having new revenue tools forces municipalities to depend more and more on property taxes, not to mention that Ontario already has the highest property taxes in Canada. The Association of Municipalities of Ontario says that without additional sources of funding, municipalities around the province will be forced to raise property taxes by 8.35% every year for the next 10 years, and that's just to keep their heads above water.

0920

Speaker, can you imagine the financial pressure that is going to be put on families and people with low incomes? That means doubling property taxes in just a decade, in a province where it's already the highest. Not to mention that it will only cover the existing standard of services and infrastructure—not new ones, but just maintaining what is there. So forget about improving your city. Not only will citizens be crushed by higher taxes; municipalities won't even be able to get things done. Again, maintaining will be the goal—maintaining. And then what? What do you do next? Can you imagine paying more and more each year just to have exactly the same services for the next 10 years? That's not a sign of a vibrant community; that's a sign of a community in trouble.

At the same time, please don't forget that the province will most likely put more responsibility on their shoulders. Governments have been consecutively downloading responsibilities and quietly reducing the funding to municipalities. The thing is that it might seem logical to download responsibilities like municipal transit operations or the repair of social housing; communities probably know better how to manage their local operations. But those operations cost money, often more money than what a single community can pay for. That's where the province should be stepping in. That's what they're

supposed to do. If every community runs smoothly, that doesn't just benefit each individual region; it benefits all of the regions in northern Ontario. It benefits Ontario as a whole.

My time has already run out and I have a lot more to say on this bill, because municipalities have been asking—this is not new. They've been asking for these tools.

I want to end with a comment that I started with from my colleague from Windsor-Tecumseh: Where is the meat? Where is the beef in this bill? It's not there.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments? I recognize the minister responsible for—as I'm kind of dragging out the time here—

Hon. Bill Mauro: Municipal affairs.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much: municipal affairs. Forgive me, Minister.

Hon. Bill Mauro: That's okay, Speaker. Thank you very much. I appreciate the acknowledgement.

I want to thank the member for his comments. I listened to part of the speech and I heard some reference—this is Bill 68 we're dealing with, the Modernizing Ontario's Municipal Legislation Act, and he made some reference to hydro costs, as the opposition parties are prone to do. Of course, hydro costs have little or nothing to do with this particular piece of legislation, but the member found some time to speak about it.

Given that he has raised it, I think it's appropriate for me to put it on the record as well and let people remember and remind them that when the NDP were in power, from 1990 to 1995, while they did not invest five cents in new generation or new transmission, somehow in that five-year period the NDP still managed to raise hydro rates in the province of Ontario by 43% in five years. That's even with a freeze.

Now, Speaker, it's hard to understand how it is that—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Point of order.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I know that the member can correct his own record—that we actually froze rates for five years, and they gave us shit for doing it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the minister, please.

Hon. Bill Mauro: So after the NDP raised rates by 43%, without investing anything into the system, they still find some cause to talk about this in the context of this legislation, which has nothing to do with hydro.

I would remind people as well, especially those in northwestern Ontario, that when the NDP were in power, they cancelled the Conawapa project that would have brought in about 1,000 megawatts of clean, green energy into northwestern Ontario. It would have been the largest transmission build, or one of the largest, in the history of the province of Ontario. To get out of that contract that had been negotiated by the previous Liberal government, they paid \$130 million to the province of Manitoba to cancel a contract that would have brought in power at four cents a kilowatt hour for 20 years.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to add my voice to the debate today. I appreciate the comments coming from the member from Algoma-Manitoulin.

It gives me an opportunity to pause and reflect on the MP-MPP forum that we had with our agricultural commodities in Huron county just this past Friday. I certainly appreciated the messaging that was coming forward from our commodity organizations: the Huron County Dairy Producers, the Huron county beef producers, the egg farmers of Huron county, and the list goes on.

I appreciate, also, the fact that all of our local municipalities in Huron county were very well represented. There was some very important dialogue shared because, as the member from Algoma-Manitoulin mentioned, farmers are targeted with regard to MPAC assessments, and the changing landscape that comes down to affecting farmers in a negative light needs to be considered because they're in a bind. Farmers across Ontario are price takers; they're the last stop in the value chain, Speaker. We need to be doing something that enables our farmers to be competitive in a stable and predictable environment here in this province.

Unfortunately, time and again, this Liberal government of the day handcuffs farmers across Ontario from being the best that they can be. I just needed to share that because you mentioned that the farmers were targeted, and it was very much evident on Friday.

Going back to Bill 68, I do want to say, though, that we need to have committee hearings in multiple areas of the province to hear from municipalities—large, small, rural, urban, southern, northern, inclusively—so we can hear how these changes are impacting them directly and that it's an authentic consultation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Because the hydro issue was raised by the member and then re-raised over there, I'll use that as my comments.

I sit here and I laugh a little bit because I was here in 1990 when the Bob Rae government was first elected. I was one of those guys who got caught in the sweep. The point is, I remember distinctly sitting on that side of the House, having seen hydro rates go up by 10% because of what was going on with Darlington the first year we were there. In other words, we were elected in 1990 in the fall and obviously we were in that budget year, and hydro rates were going up by double digits. So we decided to freeze hydro rates for four years.

The Conservatives came in after us. They continued the freeze. I don't remember for how many years, but they continued the freeze for some time.

I remember the Liberals being apoplectic. I remember the eloquent speeches of Mr. Bradley, Mr. Nixon, Mrs. McLeod and others who were here at the time. They were just up in arms that the NDP had the gall to freeze the hydro rates. You can't have it both ways. You can't, when we were in government, chastise us for freezing

rates, and now that we're on the opposition side and you're in the government, you make up that somehow or other we're the ones who raised hydro rates.

I'll take Ontario hydro rates pre-1995 any day compared to what I pay today and what people in my constituency pay.

It is so bad that the largest employer in our community picked up and went to Quebec with a refinery and a smelter. Why? Because hydro rates there are cheaper in the public system that we have in Quebec. They specifically said, and they told the Premier to his face at a meeting here in the cabinet room that I attended, along with the city of Timmins, the union and others: "We are leaving Ontario because we can't afford to pay the hydro rates."

So I will not be lectured by Liberals on that side of the House about hydro rates, because I can tell you that hydro rates, when we were in power, were much more reasonable. They have more than quadrupled since that time, mostly under their watch.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As tempting as it is to discuss the history of hydro in this province, I do want to bring the conversation back to Bill 68. There's one particular piece I want to talk about in Bill 68, and that is the issue of parental leave. I was very pleased when my colleague the member for Kitchener Centre introduced a private member's bill—it got support from all sides of the House—to ensure that members of a municipal council could take 20 weeks of maternity and parental leave. I just think that we were right, as a House, when we all decided to support that. As a government, to put that particular private member's motion into Bill 68 was exactly the right thing to do.

As the mother of three and the grandmother of five little grandchildren, I have to say that that time of life when we are blessed to have a child is a pretty special time. It doesn't happen too often in most people's lives. But when we do have that wonderful miracle happen in our family, the least we can do is be able to spend the time with our little ones before we get back to the hustle and bustle of work.

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For elected municipal politicians to be able to take 20 weeks to focus on that new baby and to just enjoy that miracle is the right thing to do. Then they can go back to worrying about bylaws and budgets and all the other things that we do.

For many reasons, I'm very pleased to support this bill, but most of all, I'm supporting this bill for the little babies who are going to get their mom and dad home when they're brand new babies.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Algoma-Manitoulin for final comments.

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's always fun when you can throw a little stone out there and it lands in someone's pocket and it aggravates them. That stone was maybe a little bit of a hydro comment that I put out there this morning. Essentially, what I was talking about is tying it

in to what municipalities are actually being faced with. To say that not improving or not working on the revenue tools that municipalities have been asking for is not in direct relation with the struggles that they are looking at with their infrastructure, with their arenas and with the services that they provide with revenue tools—why? Because a large portion of what they're paying now is the increases on their hydro bills for these arenas and this infrastructure. How can you say that this isn't related one to the other?

Anyway, I want to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the member from Huron-Bruce, the member from Timmins-James Bay and the Deputy Premier for their comments this morning. It was nice to have a little bit of engagement.

I do want to raise some of the ideas that our leader, Andrea Horwath, has put forward, as far as how we can assist municipalities instead of downloading on them. Let's look at restoring the provincial 50/50 share of the funding for municipal transit operations. That's a step in the right direction. That's being a partner. That's what municipalities are asking for, paying one third of the cost for repairing school housing and social housing, which was downloaded onto them by the PC government and never reinstated by this Liberal government.

That's what partners do, and that's what municipalities have been asking for: "Give us the tools that we need in order for us to thrive and to survive. Give us that opportunity, and we'll step up, and we're going to champion our communities." But we need an active partner, and right now this government is not responding to those needs and not responding to the requests of the many municipalities who have been asking for this for a long, long, long time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Colle: I'm going to be sharing my time with the member from Ottawa-Vanier and the Minister of Housing and Poverty Reduction.

I'll speak to Bill 68. There's a lot in it; I wish I had more time. But as was mentioned, there are the parental leaves that are now included for municipal officials. The only thing I want to say about parental leaves: I wish it was included for women who lose their babies in pregnancy. In other words, a mother could carry a baby for eight months, lose that baby, and then she's got to go back to work the next day. I think we've got to look at that too. They get no parental leave after a stillbirth or a late pregnancy loss. I would hope we would change that too in the future.

In terms of this bill, it also gives municipalities the ability to better handle extreme weather events. As you know, it's happening. We had the biggest rainfall here in Toronto a few years ago. Within an hour, more rain fell than fell in the whole season, causing massive flooding and damage in the hundreds of millions of dollars. So municipalities are given more resources and the wherewithal to deal with these extreme weather events, which are a reality.

Also, it talks about the composition of regional councils. They're very important because the regional councils take care of policing and EMS services across Ontario. They have asked for these changes.

In terms of confidential meetings, there has always been a conundrum in municipalities of what is an in camera meeting. They have asked us to clarify it. In this legislation, there is an attempt to clarify and define exactly what an in camera meeting is about. These are some of the issues.

It also allows municipalities—they have asked for this too—to appoint an integrity commissioner. We have one here, and many municipalities would like to do that too.

Those are significant things that municipalities have asked for. I know people like to sort of minimize, sometimes, what municipalities do or that these issues are not important, but they are, because they are on the job 24/7, taking care of sewers, roads, transportation and parks. These are critical things. They don't make CP24. They don't talk about the sewer work that's being done in a municipality. But the sewer work has to be done. Without good sewers, you can't have a healthy, vibrant, working municipality. You can't attract business without good sewers. These are things that sometimes are not given the attention they deserve.

I also want to mention that one of the real challenges facing my municipality of Toronto—you can just imagine, Mr. Speaker—is that every year, about 100,000 new people come into Toronto—100,000, coming to Toronto every year. We have to find housing for them. We have to find schools for them. We have to find recreational programs. Some of them need social support. So you can imagine, every year, 100,000 that need support, in a local municipality like Toronto.

That's why, over the years, we've increased funding dramatically to municipalities. I think it's up to \$4 billion a year in programs. We've uploaded about \$10 billion worth of costs back to the province that had been downloaded before.

In terms of transit funding—I heard someone mention about getting back to 50/50. I don't know if the member knows, but in Toronto, the largest crosstown public transit project in North America is 100% funded by the province of Ontario—100%. That's the Eglinton Crosstown. It has never been done before. This government has done it: 100% funding by the provincial government. It's a massive program that employs about 10,000 people and is building transit from Scarborough all the way to Etobicoke.

As I said, there are many things that we could talk about in terms of the need to support our local municipalities. The main thing is that municipalities do the day-to-day work, but they need day-to-day support in terms of legislation, in terms of their ability to govern. These are things that have to go on constantly. There isn't just one law you pass and it fixes all the day-to-day governance issues in municipalities.

That's why this Bill 68 is important as part of that ongoing collaboration with our local municipalities to

make sure they can get their job done and build our sewers, our transit, take care of our mentally ill, and try to house people.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Continuing, I now recognize the minister responsible for housing and poverty reduction.

Hon. Chris Ballard: I appreciate the few minutes to add my comments about this bill, a very important one. Like so many of my colleagues in the House, not only do I come from a municipal council background, so I have certainly followed this bill, the development of this bill, and discussion around this bill in the House very closely, but I have a personal perspective as well.

Speaker, I go back many years and I think back to when I was just a little wee kid growing up in the beautiful hamlet of King City—800 people—in 1969. I was reminded of this the other day because I saw a painting by a well-known Ontario artist, Dorothy Clark McClure. The title of the painting was *Clearing the Trees*.

What happened in 1969, in the bucolic hamlet of King township, King City, was that all of the beautiful sugar maples that lined Keele Street were cut down. The highway—the little Keele Street through King City, and King township road—was widened to four lanes.

The town never recovered from that. It became a thoroughfare for gravel trucks and everyone trying to get over to Highway 400 and get down to Toronto, and our beautiful little town was gutted.

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I think about this and it angers me constantly because as a little kid, I remember my parents and their friends in the town talking to the local council, petitioning the local council and protesting at the local council, and at the regional level as well, to stop this, to create a bypass, to listen to the people who live in this beautiful little hamlet of 800 and stop the destruction of our historic downtown—to no avail. We were not listened to. I recall as a 10-year-old boy thinking to myself in those days, "This isn't fair."

With that in the back of my mind, what I wanted to speak about for a few minutes now is the election of regional chairs, because the economic statement, the passage of Bill 70, amended the Municipal Act to require that all heads of regional council, except for Oxford county for very specific regions, be directly elected by voters starting with the 2018 municipal election. What I learned, starting back in 1969, is people need to be involved in politics and they need to have a greater say in their municipal politicians and municipal political life.

At York region, as with a number of regions around Ontario, we never had a say in who ran the region, in who was the chair of the region. It's one of the largest governments in Ontario, one of the governments with billions of dollars in debt and hundreds of millions of dollars in budget, and yet the people of York region had no direct say in who was the chair. The chair was selected by the councillors themselves, and there was always discussion and always suspicion that deals were

being done, that regional chairs were being selected because they would make a deal with various regional councillors and mayors to give them certain things in return for being the chair.

I think back to 1969 and I think to myself: That's not the way it's supposed to work. The average person on the street, members of the public, should be able to directly vote for who is going to head the second-tier government that oversees their own local municipalities.

With that in mind, I moved a private member's bill when I first arrived—my very first private member's bill—but it followed on the heels of similar attempts by the members for Richmond Hill and Oak Ridges-Markham through previous governments that almost made it to the end but then, for whatever reason—government changed or there was an election—the bill was lost. That almost happened to mine, but thankfully, it was picked up by government because the government understands—and I had the support of all the parties to move it ahead. So it was picked up and moved ahead. I'm delighted that, starting in 2018, the good folks not only in York region but in many other regions across Ontario will have the ability to directly elect perhaps the most powerful political seat in their entire region, in their entire county.

There are four regions that are affected by this amendment to the Municipal Act: York region, as I've mentioned; Peel region; Niagara region; and Muskoka district. There are a number of councils that already have elected chairs. I certainly spoke with them and members of their council, members of their municipal governments, to get their sense of how it was working, and those councils—Durham, Halton and Waterloo—told me that it was a really good thing to have the public participate in the direct election of the regional chair. In fact, I've heard from more than one directly elected regional chair who told me that it has actually now given them a stronger mandate in their position going forward. So that was a good thing.

Again, just to go back—one of the things that I'm appreciative of under the Municipal Act is the direct election of regional chair. I think it makes everyone, as a politician, more accountable when you have to stand up every four years at least and talk directly to the people who are voting for you. You can explain your past decisions, you can explain your vision for the future, and the regular folk out there get a chance to say yes or no. So, if nothing more, I am supportive of this bill for the direct election of chairs.

I will now pass the remainder of the time to my colleague.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Ottawa–Vanier.

M^{me} Nathalie Des Rosiers: Ça me fait plaisir de me lever en soutien au projet de loi numéro 68. C'est une législation qui est nécessaire pour permettre aux municipalités de faire ce qu'elles veulent faire et ce qu'elles doivent faire.

This piece of legislation that is being proposed here reflects, indeed, the differences between municipalities,

and it complements significant investments that are being made. I will speak on two issues of the bill that are, I think, particularly important to me: the increase in trust that's going to be allowed by the reforms that are being proposed by having an integrity commissioner and also clarifying when the process meets in camera or not.

This idea of improving the governance of municipalities goes hand in hand with the way in which this government supports an enhanced role for municipalities, recognizing that they are at the front line and they are the ones that are making day-to-day decisions that are very important to the people of Ontario.

Indeed, I had the chance for the last two months to meet with several mayors from a range of municipalities from the north, last January and this weekend again, about their needs, particularly their needs on housing issues. We were looking at the significant investment that were possible now under the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund, which is a permanent program which permits and will support and fund municipal roads, bridges and other critical infrastructure.

The more money that is in the system, the more accountability is needed to frame and ensure that good decisions are being made. This bill provides this. It provides reassurance to the people of Ontario that municipal decision-making will be framed in accountability measures that are necessary and that correspond to the modern framework of accountability and good governance that we now know.

The other part that came up from this series of discussions with various mayors and representatives from municipalities is that they also wish to continue to have the tools that they need to address climate change and the range of possibilities that are now facing them. It's a partnership to address climate change between the province and municipalities; we know that. It is important that the tools be distributed appropriately.

I also had the chance to meet with the northern municipalities on discussing their housing issues and also the increased funding that will be made available with the doubling of funding of the return of the gas tax. This again precipitates a good discussion on what is needed to make good decisions.

Let me address the two aspects of this bill that are necessary on the integrity front and on the good governance front that I think make sense.

There's no doubt that when you have a bill that is called the Modernizing Ontario's Municipal Legislation Act, you expect that there will be an embrace of new forms of good governance that are well known, and this bill does exactly this. It uses the theme of integrity to ensure that municipalities make decisions that citizens can trust, and that there are no allegations or there's the possibility of, if you have allegations of the misuse of money or a bad decision or a conflict of interest, that there is a forum for you to raise it appropriately. That's an important part.

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In my past life as general counsel for the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, we were always constantly

approached by people who thought they had been badly treated by municipal councillors or had been shut out of meetings where an in camera meeting had been declared. I think what this bill does is provide some clarity about when it's appropriate to go in camera, and then, when it's not appropriate to go in camera, to ensure the transparency that is needed for citizens to trust that good decisions are made and that all the points of view have been considered. So I think this bill, in a way, moves us to a new era of good governance at the municipal level that we need to trust.

I want to say that I think that this bill will be particularly welcome in my riding of Ottawa–Vanier because, again, it does provide a regime of trust and a regime of integrity that will continue to enhance the confidence that people in Ottawa–Vanier want to have about the municipal decisions that affect them. I know that people in my riding are very concerned about the way in which they want to have some refurbishment of Montreal Road, which is right in my riding. That's where my constituency office is. We know we need it badly. I know this will allow people to have trust that the investments that are being made, that are now available to municipalities, are transparently decided and transparently made for all the people in the riding.

I want to conclude by also mentioning a few points about parental leave. I think this bill brings municipal governance into the 21st century by recognizing that parental leave is needed, so that we ensure that our municipal leaders are indeed reflective of all segments of society. It's important for our good governance to not have artificial barriers to prevent women from participating fully in the governance structure of Ontario. Municipal councils are one of them, so the idea that this actually speaks to parental leave, which was an issue that's raised often when we look at the difficulty for women to enter politics—I think it is a good thing to have in this bill.

I am supporting this bill for these two reasons, because it does reflect the need for women's participation in politics, and also because it increases the level of trust that will be available for municipal decision-making.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's my pleasure to rise in debate today on Bill 68, which is the Modernizing Ontario's Municipal Legislation Act.

I'd be remiss if I didn't also congratulate my colleague from Ottawa–Vanier, who just spoke, for her election win, and also for the passage of her first private member's motion last week, which is not related at all to anything at hand, with the exception of commenting to the member.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: She spoke to both.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: She spoke to both.

We, in many ways, support modernizing the Municipal Act. We understand it needs to be reviewed, and we support many of the changes that are being made by the government.

We do, however, think that because this does affect all of Ontario's municipalities, it must be reviewed and there

must be substantive public hearings so that cities like mine, in Ottawa, are consulted and reviewed. Obviously, Ontario is a very big province with many different kinds of municipalities, Speaker. Ottawa has almost one million people, but alas, when you look outside of the city, there are very many small municipalities, much, much smaller than our big city. Obviously, I would hope that this act would take that into consideration.

A couple of other specific problems that we have identified with the bill in the Ontario Progressive Conservative caucus are that it conflicts with the finance bill. On the same day the Minister of Municipal of Affairs introduced this bill, the Minister of Finance actually introduced Bill 70, which required direct election of regional chairs and actually amends the exact same sections of the Municipal Act. So I think the government has got to get itself under control.

The municipal elections bill passed last June, Bill 181, the Municipal Elections Modernization Act, dealing with municipal elections. We feel that this is contradictory because, just five months later, they introduced a bill that dramatically increases the contributions that they were set upon to limit.

Also, participating in meetings electronically—I have a very short period of time—the government is unable to answer whether calling in to a council meeting would count as an absence.

There are legitimate criticisms of this bill, and we'll be looking forward to bringing it to committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's my pleasure to rise to add some comment to Bill 68, the Modernizing Ontario's Municipal Legislation Act, 2016.

The one piece that has really piqued my interest is the part where it says about municipalities adopting a policy to allow leaves due to pregnancy. I would hope that there will be some clarification, something coming forward around that piece, so that it would not just be due to pregnancy but would actually include if a city councillor adopts a child. When you bring a child into your home, adopt a child, there is an adjustment period. It's the same as giving birth to a child. You still need to be there to care for that child, to bond with that child. The needs aren't any different. So I would hope that there is going to be some provision in the bill to allow for leave due to adoption.

The other piece that I hope will be taken into consideration, should this make it to committee, is that this speaks specifically to municipalities, so we're talking about city councillors or mayors or wardens or whatever you call them in your particular region. What it doesn't address is school board trustees. Often people forget—including the government, frankly—that school board trustees are also elected officials. They run in municipal elections, along with our city councillors and our mayors. They are elected officials, and they deserve the same respect as those that are elected to our city councils.

I hope that the government will take that into account in committee and add that school boards must allow for

parental leave—I'd rather call it "parental leave" than "leave due to pregnancy"—that they will allow for parental leave, because there are rules in the Education Act that govern how much time a trustee can miss from their duties.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Bob Delaney: I am pleased to comment on this proposed piece of legislation. I want to make just a few short observations.

A body of law is very much a living thing, and it's got to have the ability to evolve, to shift with the times in which people have to use that body of law to conduct themselves. And so it is the case with the Ontario Municipal Act and its companion, the City of Toronto Act.

In the matter of having an integrity commissioner available to municipalities, I think that's an important one. It isn't so much that the integrity commissioner comes down on an elected member as that an elected member knows, if he or she has a question about something, that they can pick up the phone and call the integrity commissioner in complete confidence and say, "I just want to discuss with you the following thing in the municipal arena"—it might pertain to land development; it might pertain to an industry that is planning to move in or out—"and I just want to know what the limits are on this."

As you work with people, you get to know them, and you never want to step outside the boundary of what's right and proper. But having that integrity commissioner there, to be able to pick up the phone and to ask, is often a very handy thing. Probably the best problems to solve are the ones that never occur in the first place, and one of the best ways to ensure that a problem never occurs is to have someone available to provide you professional, impartial, and confidential counsel. It gives an elected member the confidence to pick up the phone and to ask, and to resolve a problem before it becomes an issue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mrs. Julia Munro: It gives me great pleasure to be able, in the few moments we have, to add a couple of other comments to the discussion on Bill 68.

One of the things that strikes me about looking at these pieces of legislation is the enormity of the task that is set upon the municipal leaders across the province with bills such as this.

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It's noted that the number of submissions ranged in the hundreds, which gives you a clue as to the first level of response—that we've got to look at this and see how we're going to manage it.

One of the problems that we see here in bills such as this is the issue of the workload of the individual municipal councillor. I think there is a very big gap between what is expected of that person and what is actually physically possible. I look in my own communities where there is significant growth in the population. With just

that come more pieces of red tape, more issues and challenges that municipal councillors face in looking after this explosion that takes place.

I recall having conversations with individuals who have called because I'm an elected person, even though on a different level of government, on things like, "How much family time does this take? When do I work holidays? What happens to the time I have to spend"—recognizing that it multiplies.

It seems as if the workload just continues to be a demand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I return to the member from Eglinton—Lawrence for final comments.

Mr. Mike Colle: I want to thank the members from Nepean—Carleton, Windsor West, Mississauga—Streetsville, York—Simcoe and my colleagues—the member from Ottawa—Vanier, who spoke about Montreal Road and the importance of fixing the potholes there, and the Minister of Housing—for their comments.

I just want to say that in this bill, as I've said, there are many important things that maybe from a provincial perspective don't seem that significant; but to municipalities, these changes that they have been asking for are significant. As I said, the ability to deal with extreme weather events—that is a reality: flooding, hydro issues, transit sinkholes that are happening. There's another one here in Toronto. There's a big one in Ottawa. These extreme events happen, and municipalities want to be able to deal with those events. That's what this bill deals with.

Also, I just wanted to mention one thing that is in this bill which I support, and that is the parental leave and maternity leave for elected officials. As I said previously, it boggles the mind why we haven't allowed or put in legislation that gives maternity leave or parental leave for women who experience pregnancy loss or stillbirths. If they carry a baby for nine months, eight months and unfortunately lose the baby, they have to go back to work the next day—no protection from employment, no protection from the government.

I know we're doing it for municipal councillors, and that's fantastic, but what about the over 100,000 women every year who go through pregnancy loss? We should also have protections in place for them. Give them some maternity leave. They shouldn't have to go back to work after carrying a baby and losing that baby. The trauma, the postpartum depression that sets in—we need to protect those mothers too. It's about time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It's a pleasure this morning to speak to Bill 68, An Act to amend various Acts in relation to municipalities. I want to try to limit my comments to two specific sections which I find the most concerning, quite frankly, and I want to underline that many of the issues that I've heard have come directly from individuals in Dufferin—Caledon who currently serve on council, or even the experts in the field, as I like to call them, the clerks and treasurers who are the support for our various

regional governments, county governments and municipal governments.

Let's start with section 268. This section would allow that the council of a local municipality—we would often call that the lower-tier municipality—"may appoint one of its members as an alternate member of the upper-tier" municipality. I'll give you an example. In the county of Dufferin, we have the county of Dufferin and we have eight municipalities: Orangeville, Amaranth, Shelburne, Grand Valley—you get the idea.

In effect, what this section would mean is: An issue comes forward that is directly related and impacts the town of Shelburne. The town of Shelburne says, "Hey, you council rep, you mayor, you deputy mayor, we don't want you to go today to county council. We're going to put George in, because George has a particular interest in this issue." So you have, in effect, this moving table at the county level or the regional table where you can move people up for specific issues. I'm very concerned about that section and, frankly, I would love to have some government member explain to me the justification for it, because it can very much impact what happens at the county or the regional level.

As you all know, county councillors and regional councillors are assigned particular roles. When they go and they are part of the upper level of government—the regional or the county level—they become chairs of the public works, of social services. They have specific responsibilities. Their responsibilities are not related to the community that they directly serve.

When you move to the regional level, when you move to the county level, you are there for all of the community. You are not there as an Orangeville representative or as a Mono representative; you are there as a Dufferin county representative. So I would love to have some explanation as to why that amendment has been put in, because many individuals in my community who serve at the upper level are wondering what the justification, what the reasoning, for that is.

The second thing is related to electronic participation. This is section 238 of the act, as amended, by adding the following subsection:

"The applicable procedure bylaw may provide that a member of council, of a local board or of a committee of either of them, can participate electronically in a meeting which is open to the public to the extent and in the manner set out in the bylaw provided that any such member shall not be counted in determining whether" there is a quorum, but they can vote.

This is what I'm now calling the mail-it-in amendment. I know many members spend a lot of time in their car over the weekend, attending events. I do—far too much time in my car. If you are a CBC listener, there is a radio program on Saturdays called This Is That. It's satire. I'm going to underline that: It's satire.

Many months ago, the program This Is That had a news feature that talked about how the federal government was going to allow MPs to electronically vote on legislation that was happening at the federal level. This is

satire. It was actually quite funny. It was 10 or 15 minutes, and they were mock-interviewing MPs who said, "Oh, yeah, it would be great if I could stay in my bathtub or hot tub and then vote on the amendment as it came forward," and on and on it went.

Lo and behold, the next day, I'm at another event and a constituent comes up to me and he says, "Sylvia, I am so offended that the federal government is actually considering allowing MPs to vote in and not have to attend to their duties in Ottawa."

I'm in a very uncomfortable position to explain to the individual that in fact it was satire, and no, the federal government is not going to allow it. Well, guess what? We're allowing it with Bill 68. How foolish. The whole part of this debate, the whole part of why we participate here in this chamber, is to hear the other side, to listen to the debates, to try to convince people that this amendment is going to cause problems.

Back to the This Is That satire program: Canada is fairly large. Ontario is fairly large. We have 444 municipalities in the province of Ontario. We are not expecting our municipal representatives to travel for two and a half days to get to their centre of government, participate in debates and vote on legislation or, in their case, bylaws.

Please, please, please explain to me why we need the mail-it-in amendment. I don't like it, as you can probably tell. I don't understand why it's there. As the warden of one of my counties explained to me, they already have the ability, in an emergency situation, to have a discussion, to have an executive decision, to have a committee move forward on things when there is an emergency in their municipality. Please don't tell me that this is to ensure that, when we have a tornado or we have heavy flooding, this will allow the municipal government to continue, because that's not the case. We already have that in place. That ability is already there under our municipal government.

I would love for the government to remove the mail-it-in amendment. I do not see the value of it. I do not see what you're trying to solve. What are you trying to improve? What are you trying to fix? What are we trying to fix with that particular amendment to section 238? I don't understand. I don't see it. I have yet to have a municipal representative who isn't saying tongue-in-cheek that they need that mail-it-in amendment. It's not appropriate. Part of what we have as a responsibility is to come to consensus.

Often when I talk at schools and to people about the various differences between the municipal, provincial and federal levels of government, I try to explain that municipally, historically and generally, people don't affiliate themselves with a particular party system. Part of that is because municipal government tends to base its decisions on finding some common ground. Provincially and federally we do it much more along party affiliations. At the municipal level, what we try to do is not have those, "I'm always going to vote with this bloc of individuals. I am always going to vote with this bloc of

people.” If we do not have the individual councillors sitting around the council table and hearing the other side, we’re not going to have that.

What they’re going to do is, on Friday night, they’re going to review their council package, they’re going to go through it and they’re going to put an “S” or an “O” behind every amendment—potential bylaw. They’re not going to listen to the other council members explain their side. They’re not going to hear from the public, who often appear at council—in person, I might add, Speaker. They don’t get to mail it in. They appear in front of council to explain why they support or oppose a particular bylaw or amendment change. They’re just going to mail it in and either call or have the computer set up so that they can just say “support” or “oppose.”

I don’t think that any of us wants that to happen at the municipal level. I certainly don’t want to have it happen at the federal level, notwithstanding how funny the *This Is That* satire program was on it.

I grant that the timing is coming to an end, but if I can finish with: If we could have the mail-it-in amendment removed, I would be very happy.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): It is now 10:15. This House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1014 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Lorne Coe: I’m pleased to introduce Dianne McKenzie, the executive director, and Chelsea Kerstens of Epilepsy Durham Region to the Legislature.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It’s my absolute pleasure to introduce Victor Hayes, who’s the professor, and all the students from public affairs at Humber College in Toronto who are here today.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I too want to introduce some folks from Epilepsy Toronto and Durham: Susan Hamson from Epilepsy Ontario, Drew Woodley from Epilepsy Toronto and, last but not least, Chelsea Kerstens and Dianne McKenzie from Epilepsy Durham. It was a pleasure to meet them this morning.

Mrs. Gila Martow: I’m happy to introduce Andrew Vittas, a CJPAC member, as well as Damon Lee and D’Arcy Kimmell from LGBTory and, of course, my predecessor—I won’t steal your thunder; I’ll just say his name is Peter. Welcome.

Hon. Bill Mauro: It gives me great pleasure to introduce to the House today, in the members’ east gallery, the mayor of Hearst, Roger Sigouin.

Mr. Jim Wilson: We have visiting us in the public gallery this morning the mother of page captain Nolan Campbell, Leanne Campbell.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Joining us shortly will be Hugh Moran, president of the Ontario Petroleum Institute.

Although I’m sure the Speaker will recognize him in a different capacity, I’d like to recognize our old friend, the coach and general manager of the Ontario Legiskaters, Jean-Marc Lalonde.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I had a great meeting this morning with Cynthia Milburn, David Charchalis and Jennifer Lyon from Epilepsy South Central Ontario. Welcome to Queen’s Park.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I would like to welcome to Queen’s Park two representatives of Epilepsy Ontario from Simcoe county: Paul Raymond of Alliston and Melanie Jeffrey from my riding of Barrie.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I’d like to welcome to the Legislature page captain Sophie Pellerine’s family: mother, Philippa Pellerine, who is a teacher with my sister Sue at St. Anne’s school; sister, Tessa Pellerine; grandmother, Pauline Southwood; and her aunt, Alison Topp. Welcome to the Legislature.

Hon. Chris Ballard: I’m delighted to welcome the parents of today’s page captain, Mary Sadono: Yola and Andre Sadono. Welcome to Queen’s Park.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I’m honoured to welcome to Queen’s Park today the mayor of Adelaide Metcalfe—I’m sure one of the youngest mayors in Ontario—Kurtis Smith, and his girlfriend, Bridget Johnson. Welcome to Queen’s Park.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I’d like to welcome a good friend, Jeff Mole, president of Community Enterprise Network. Welcome, Jeff.

L’hon. Marie-France Lalonde: Je sais qu’il a été mentionné, mais je voudrais, pour les Franco-Ontariens ici, reconnaître notre ancien membre, mais aussi un nouvel élu à la ville de Rockland comme conseiller municipal, M. Jean-Marc Lalonde.

Mme France Gélinas: I’m pleased to introduce Paul Raymond, executive director of Epilepsy Ontario, to Queen’s Park today. Paul is joined by 20 community epilepsy agency representatives from across the province, and all MPPs are invited to their reception tonight in the dining room.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I’d like to welcome CORD, the Canadian Organization for Rare Disorders, who is here today on Rare Disease Day. Thank you for all the work that you do for advocating for Ontarians living with rare diseases.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It’s not often, Mr. Speaker, that somebody comes all the way down from Timmins, so we have to say hello to Rhonda Latendresse from Epilepsy Ontario, who is here lobbying on behalf of our community today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As is the tradition of the Speaker to introduce former members, regardless of their previous and new backgrounds, I would like to introduce the former member who served Prescott and Russell in the 36th and Glengarry—Prescott—Russell in the 37th, 38th and 39th Parliaments: Monsieur Jean-Marc Lalonde.

Also in the gallery with us today—

Mr. Mike Colle: Peter Shurman.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I love it when the Speaker is heckled.

Also in the gallery, the former member who served for Thornhill in the 39th and 40th Parliaments: Mr. Peter Shurman.

Also in the Speaker's gallery are guests of mine from the riding of Brant and from Six Nations territory on the Grand River: Mr. Terry General, Michael Montour and Charles Martin. Welcome. Thank you for being here.

We also have with us in the Speaker's gallery today the Consul General of the Czech Republic at Toronto, Mr. Ivan Počuch. Welcome. With him is the economic and trade section of the consulate, Mr. David Müller.

I welcome all of our guests to the House today.

The member from Timmins—James Bay.

M. Gilles Bisson: Monsieur le Président, ma grande erreur. Quelqu'un qui est même plus loin que Timmins, qui vient de Hearst, le maire de Hearst : M. Roger Sigouin.

ORAL QUESTIONS

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Todd Smith: My question this morning is for the Premier. This government likes to say that hindsight is 20/20 when they talk about the electricity crisis that they've created in the province.

A couple of weeks ago, the leader of the official opposition and I were in Timmins—and we welcome the folks from the Timmins area who are with us this morning. Let's go back to 2014, when the city of Timmins paid \$3.7 million for electricity. Now, Timmins pays \$5.3 million for electricity, an increase of \$1.6 million on the municipality's electricity budget.

How much more does the Premier think that she can squeeze out of the people of Timmins?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm pleased to rise and respond to the question relating to what this government has done to ensure that we are finding ways to lower rates for all Ontarians and for municipalities.

As the Premier has said in the past, we've done some hard work, the heavy lifting, to ensure that we've rebuilt a system that is no longer relying on coal and ensuring that we build a system where we have power in the north—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm going to ask my threesome over here to bring it down. If it doesn't, this will be the last time I'll try to be calm about it.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker—and again, invested billions of dollars in making sure that we rebuilt our transmission system that was left in a shambles when we took over back in 2003. Of course, that takes time and money. What we've done is find ways of reducing those costs that we've had.

I'll make sure I answer more of that in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Todd Smith: Back to the Premier: The government has lit the house on fire and they're trying to use the garden hose to put out the flames.

Let's go back to 2014. Quinte Health Care, which operates four hospitals in my region, paid \$2.1 million in electricity costs in 2014. It is up \$600,000 since then. That's almost 30%. If you go back to 2012, it's up almost \$1 million for the hospitals in my region.

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If the Premier doesn't want to talk about dollars, let's talk about doctors. How many more doctors is your electricity crisis going to cost the patients in the Quinte region of Ontario?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: It's interesting to hear from that side of the House. They were actually going to close one of those hospitals, and it was this government that kept those hospitals open and invested in health care, to make sure that we have doctors in that part of our province.

So let's be clear and let's look at the facts. We've ensured that we have got programs in place to help hospitals. For example, in my riding of Sudbury, Health Sciences North saves about \$200,000 a year after using the saveONenergy program. They are then putting that money back into health care services.

Mr. Speaker, there are programs in place, there are systems in place to ensure that we keep the lights on, that we keep the operating rooms—with the electricity that they need—and at the same time reducing costs. We're going to continue to find ways to do more.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. Todd Smith: It's time for this government to stop doing more, because every time they do more, it hurts more and more the people of Ontario.

Just before the end of the business day yesterday, my office was made aware of a family in Chatham-Kent, down in southwestern Ontario. The same utility controls both the electricity and the water for this family—Entegrus. On Friday, when their electricity was turned back on, their water was turned off. They were told that it would only be turned back on when they were no longer in arrears.

Cities, hospitals, families—all hurting. That's your Ontario, Premier. That's your Ontario. Everybody is hurting.

Speaker, what price is too high for this government?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I couldn't say it, or I'll be thrown out.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You're working on it.

Minister?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: There are many electricity companies around the province that look after both water and electricity, but when they look after the water component, they're looking after that for their local municipality. I would encourage them to contact their local municipality.

We will find ways to continue to do more, because if we were actually to follow what that party did, we would have left our system in a shambles. We would have relied on coal. We no longer want to rely on coal. We want to ensure that we have a clean system, that we have—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's my line. I would ask the member not to use his line.

It's not helpful when I'm hearing an answer from that side. That side is noisy as well, but it's not helpful when the person asking the question is yelling as well. I suspect he wants to listen.

Finish, please.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Coming back to disconnections: Last week we had the bill pass this House unanimously, which was great news. I was very pleased to see that the OEB acted very quickly and decisively. On Thursday, they issued a decision to all local utilities to make sure that they have all of these reconnections connected—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds-Grenville and the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, come to order.

New question.

RARE DISEASES

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is to the Premier. One year ago, hundreds of patients who travelled here from across the province watched the Liberal government strike down a PC motion that sufferers had counted on to create a select committee on rare disease treatment. They are here again today, one year after this Liberal government announced its own rare disease working group that would "now begin taking concrete action."

Speaker, it has been a year. What concrete action has the government taken?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I just want to say that we know that many Ontarians have family members who are struggling with a rare disease or disorder, and our hearts go out to them. But because these diseases are very rare, often they are misdiagnosed.

I'm very pleased that we've been able to move ahead. Just yesterday, Minister Hoskins announced an expansion to clinics for those needing specialized care. As the member knows, there's a working group of experts that is in place who can explore how services for people with rare diseases can be improved in Ontario.

These are very challenging, very specific situations. We need to have experts who give us ongoing advice. In the interim, the minister has announced an increase to support for clinics.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Harris: While we were happy, of course, to see EDS sufferers—who were forced to come

to Queen's Park last year—get their clinic, the fact is that they had to travel to the Legislature in failing health before the minister or your government would do anything. In fact, it seems this Liberal government only acts for Ontarians after they've been forced to come to Queen's Park to beg for life-saving support—and the cameras are on.

While it may have been politically expedient to finally support EDS once the cameras switched off, so did the hopes for hundreds of thousands of other sufferers with cystic fibrosis, Castleman's disease, PKU, aHUS or a host of other rare diseases.

Speaker, it's Rare Disease Day. The cameras are back on. Will the Premier report where and what is the strategy to help Ontarians suffering from all rare diseases?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: As much as the member opposite might want to try to make this political or try to make it partisan, it has been the better part of two years—in fact, this Premier led the charge nationally for the creation of a working group on rare diseases long before the member opposite raised this in the Legislature.

Importantly, we did hear from patients with EDS, Ehlers-Danlos syndrome. Thanks to their important advocacy and the advocacy of the group that often represents them, ILC Canada, we were able to create a task force which included patients and patient advocates on it—an expert task force and panel—that actually led to the creation of the announcement I made yesterday, which was funding of \$1 million ongoing for a partnership between University Health Network and SickKids to actually provide specialized care specifically for children and adults with EDS. I'm proud of that decision.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Michael Harris: Speaker, this minister has had the Ontario Citizens' Council report on rare diseases strategies since 2010 and has done nothing with it. He told us last spring that we would have working group recommendations within three months. We're knee-deep in empty words. What we need is action. If he has the report, he should actually table it today.

When it comes down to governing, it's all about choices and priorities: choices to strike down an all-party, open and transparent rare-disease select committee in favour of a behind-the-doors working group; and prioritizing to spend what's left of our tax dollars on the matters that will best impact the lives of all Ontarians, unlike relocating gas plants.

Speaker, will the Premier tell us why, when it came to a choice between subsidizing a \$140,000 Tesla owner with massive rebates versus spending to treat rare disease, she went with the new car?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, instead of having politicians make these decisions in the form of a select committee, we knew—from advocates, from patients, from scientists, from academics, from clinicians—many of the steps that needed to be taken. So we created a

working group, quite frankly, comprised of those experts, a working group on rare diseases. I have not received the final report. I'm expecting to receive it in the coming several weeks.

It's a working group which is chaired by Dr. Ronald Cohn, Pediatrician-in-Chief at the Hospital for Sick Children; with Scott McIntaggart, who is a senior vice-president of the University Health Network; Crystal Chin, a patient; Guida Clozza, a patient caregiver; Dr. Richard Ward, a physician-lead at UHN in blood disorders programs; and Dr. Pranesh Chakraborty, director of Newborn Screening Ontario—the exact and precise people who should be providing that advice to the government. They're doing that. I'll be receiving it in the next several weeks.

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ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Premier. The Premier has said that she will look at fixing hydro. The Premier has had 14 years to look at solving this problem and four years as Premier: four years as Premier and 14 years as a government to solve a crisis that they helped create. Ontario needs more than a Premier or an electricity minister to look at solutions to this crisis. They need someone who is going to act on solving this problem.

Here's the question. Here's a concrete thing that this government can act on. Will this government act to commit to a real promise to end rural delivery charges?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: There are many ideas that are coming forward, and I appreciate the member opposite putting forward some thoughts. The reality is that we have committed to bringing forward a plan before the budget comes out, and that plan will be a plan to reduce electricity prices immediately.

We have already begun. The 8% reduction is already on people's bills. That is already being taken off people's bills.

The plan we bring forward will mean more immediate reductions—unlike, I would say, the plan that was brought forward yesterday by the NDP, the cornerstone of which is a pillar, the repurchasing of Hydro One, which would not take one cent off one electricity bill.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Here's another idea: ending time-of-use fees. Ending time-of-use fees isn't just a wild policy idea; it will actually impact people immediately and have a real impact on their lives. Take, for example, Ann-May. Here's an example. Ann-May—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Start the clock.

Finish, please.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Take Ann-May, for example. She's a senior living in Hamilton. She has recently been told that she's got to start using an in-home oxygen-making machine. That's going to increase her bill by about \$250, which will pretty much double her hydro

bill. If Ann-May could opt out of time-of-use fees, she could actually be at home and use her machine during the day instead of having to be up all night and worrying about how she's actually going to afford to use this machine.

This is how it should be. Hydro is a necessity, not a luxury. Will this government commit to ending these unfair, mandatory time-of-use fees?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: When it comes to time of use, Mr. Speaker, time of use actually provides an overall benefit to the entire province by conserving power during peak demand. But we do understand, like the example that was used by the honourable member, that there are some people who do need to use power during peak times. That's why we've already started the process with our system operator of looking at actually having some type of alternative plan, having time of use and having a flat-rate plan. We're so far into this that the OEB has already started a pilot project looking at that.

But the important thing for us on this one case is, the individual who needs to use a piece of medical equipment can actually apply for the Ontario Electricity Support Program and see their benefit double. I do hope that that person gets access to that information.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, people in Ontario need to see real changes that will actually impact their life right now, to make sure that the hydro system is actually working for them.

The Premier says they're working on it, but they've had lots of time. They've been in power since before Facebook was a thing. They've been in power since Destiny's Child was better known than Beyoncé. In fact, this government took power when people were still renting VHS tapes from Blockbuster. This government has had a lot of time, but we're not seeing any results. How much more time will it take so that people can see some justice with respect to their energy costs?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: We've been in power long enough to ensure that we've eliminated coal. We've been in power long enough to ensure that our system is reliable. We've been in power long enough to ensure that people can actually use our system and not worry about it having a brownout.

We actually invested in our system over the last 14 years to make it a better system than was there before, to make it a cleaner system than was there before, and to make sure that people who have asthma can go outside and take a breath of fresh air and not worry about having a smog day, which we haven't had in this province since 2014. We need to be proud of that.

Other states and other provinces are looking to us because we've been leading the way in building a system that is clean and reliable. We are taking it to the next level to make it as affordable as possible.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Start the clock.

New question.

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM FUNDING

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is again to the Premier. Yesterday the Premier said that if stopping the sell-off of Hydro One is a priority, then investing in infrastructure would have to take a backseat. Just because the Premier says that Ontario can't have affordable public power and build infrastructure at the same time doesn't mean it's true. In fact, if the Premier continues to repeat it, it doesn't make it any more true.

My question to the Premier is this: I'm pretty sure that Ontario has had public power for over a century. I'm also sure that over that century, we've built infrastructure—

Mr. Mike Colle: Ottawa needs you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Eglinton—Lawrence.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: We've invested in public infrastructure and transportation infrastructure. My question is, why can't this Premier do the same thing?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, it's very interesting. The member opposite makes the assertion that there has been building of infrastructure in a rational way over decades, and that's actually not true. The reality is that there were long periods, there were decades, where infrastructure was not built, where investments were not made. We know that if there isn't a 5% investment in infrastructure year over year—and that can be a combination of federal, provincial and municipal contributions—then in fact we're not even keeping up with, let alone building, new infrastructure that's needed. We've actually tackled that, and we've actually broken that cycle of neglect that had been in place for at least 20 years.

We're going to continue to build infrastructure, because that leads to economic growth and that leads to the well-being of people in this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: The Premier said when she "travels to other countries and talks to businesses about coming to Ontario, they want to know about infrastructure." I think that makes sense, and a part of that infrastructure is the cost of hydro. Does the Premier admit that sky-high hydro rates are hurting current businesses here in Ontario and discouraging other businesses from investing in our province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Actually, Mr. Speaker, I will tell you that in all of the conversations that I have had in other countries, the number one issue that people raise with me is availability of talented, skilled people. That is the number one concern and it is the number one reason that businesses come to Ontario. If you talk to Thomson Reuters, the reason that they are coming here explicitly is because of a terrific supply chain of well-educated, talented people.

That is who we are in Ontario. That is what we are selling to the world. We're leading economic growth in this country largely because of our talented, skilled—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated. Thank you.

Final supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: It seems like this is the same sort of false logic. By talking about the rising price of hydro, I didn't in any way talk about the fact that we don't have a talented pool of people. But it shows this government's lack of logical rationale; they can't address the issue.

On the topic of drawing businesses to Ontario, the Ontario government should also look at what the Ontario Chamber of Commerce has to say about our current hydro system in this province. The 2017 economic report states that the experience that many households have with respect to rising electricity rates are amplified when it comes to businesses. The report goes on to note that the uncertainty with respect to these rates is discouraging businesses from investing here in this province, and that means fewer jobs for the people of Ontario.

Here's the reality: We need to invest in infrastructure. We need to build not only affordable public hydro, but a public transit system and transportation infrastructure. Instead of selling a false choice that people don't believe, will the government actually start to do that?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Economic Development and Growth.

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Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, it would be nice if the NDP would stop talking down our economy. Our business community, the people of this province and the talented people the Premier talked about have worked very hard with this government to build this economy up. They've created 700,000 net new jobs, yet the party opposite keeps talking their efforts down. That's not fair.

And then they say—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Speaker, they talk those efforts down by saying they're part-time jobs—wrong; 90% are full time.

They talk them down by saying they're not good-paying jobs—wrong; 80% are above the average wage.

They say that they're public sector jobs—wrong; 75% are private sector jobs.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

New question.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Last week, I questioned the Premier about a life-changing therapy for cerebral palsy patients in the province and the barriers created by this government to access the surgery.

Later that day, the government decided to approve the surgery costs for Madison Ambos in St. Louis.

While we're happy for Madison, there are many other children waiting for support from this government on the

already approved treatment. Will the minister cut the red tape in his ministry and approve the other children who are awaiting surgery today?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Speaker, this is a critically important issue: access to the highest-quality health care, in this case, a specialized surgery for individuals, generally cerebral palsy children, who can benefit from this surgery. That's why it is an OHIP-insured procedure.

We also rely on the clinical expertise of specialists in this province to make that determination whether or not the individual will benefit from that particular procedure. That's what we've done.

We've received, thus far, I believe, 17 applications for out-of-country care. Of those, four did not have the support of their attending specialist. I believe two are still under consideration, and 10—perhaps now 11—out of the 17 have been approved. Those individuals have gone for their surgery or are in the process of preparing to go for their surgery in the United States. This is a good example, I believe, where we have a system that is working effectively.

I understand there do remain certain challenges, and I'm working hard to ensure that our clinical experts are able to provide this care.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Back to the minister: Speaker, I have over 21 names here of children who are lost in the bureaucratic nightmare this government has created. Unfortunately, with this government, the only way to get access to services is to raise it in the Legislature.

So, Mr. Speaker, what is the government going to do for Benjamin, Alesandro, Maya, Athena, Leah, Griffin, J.R., Nathan, Syona, Davi, Ethan, Sofia, Taylor, Teigan, Leyla, Bentley, Morgane, Brooklyn, Aidan, Chenoa and Ben? Their names are on record now. Will the minister act and do the right thing, and get the surgery for these children?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, it appears that the member opposite has recently obtained his medical degree.

We need to leave it to the clinical experts to make these determinations. Virtually 100% of the time—where an application for out-of-country surgery is made to the province of Ontario with the support of the clinical expert, that application has been approved 100% of the time.

We have two clinics in this province, one in Hamilton and one here in Toronto. We're also working with SickKids and Holland Bloorview on the possibility of establishing the expertise to actually perform the surgery here in the province, to provide that service not in another country but here in Ontario.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: How long will that take?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: We have a process. I know the member opposite is wondering how long that takes. It's

important that it's an evidence-based decision; we work with our clinical experts.

But 100% of the children who have come forward with the support of their families, with the support of their clinical experts, have been given the opportunity for that surgery.

ENERGY POLICIES

Ms. Jennifer K. French: My question is to the Premier. The Premier promised that winter hydro disconnections would stop. Well, Georgina lives in Oshawa. She pays her hydro bill to a private company that sub-meters her apartment building and not to the local utility. This private company is regulated by the OEB, but they are not being told to stop disconnections, so Georgina has had her power cut off.

What is the Premier going to do to get Georgina's power back on?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: As mentioned last week, we passed the legislation to give the Ontario Energy Board the power to end winter disconnections within our province. We were very pleased that the OEB acted quickly and decisively. On Thursday of last week, the OEB issued a decision to all utilities—and that would include these companies—that banned all disconnects until April 30—

Mr. John Yakabuski: They don't have the stove to boil the water.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Renfrew, second time.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: —required currently disconnected customers to be reconnected at no cost and ordered the removal of any load limiters being used to limit electricity use.

The OEB has announced a comprehensive hearing and review process for customer service rules. I'd be happy to speak with the member afterwards to ensure that we can get all of the information to help that one individual.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: It would seem that the minister is also disconnected, but I'm more concerned about Georgina right now.

It turns out that there is a loophole in the Premier's promise that people won't have their power cut off during the winter. The Premier surely must have been briefed about this loophole, but I guess she didn't choose to fix the problem. It looks like the Liberals are more interested again in scoring a political win than really fixing the problem of winter connections.

When did the Premier learn about this loophole, and what is she going to do to close it?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Again, the OEB has acted quickly on this and in making sure all local utilities will stop winter disconnects. It happened last Thursday. We're making sure that everyone is going to be reconnected as soon as possible.

The important thing is, we acted on this. We started talking about this in June and now we're very pleased to see this happening. We're going to ensure that we continue to find ways to help all ratepayers right across the province. We're going to come forward with a real action plan, one that's not based off of ideology and ideas. We have really good ideas that we're bringing forward—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings and the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, come to order.

One wrap-up sentence, please.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

ADDICTION SERVICES

Mr. John Fraser: I was back in my hometown of Ottawa last night at a meeting organized by the city of Ottawa and councillors with regard to the—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Maybe you can get an answer from your government when I can't.

Mr. John Fraser: This is an important issue. Maybe you could listen.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean–Carleton, come to order.

Mr. John Fraser: This is a serious issue which should concern us all.

There have been three deaths in the city of Ottawa in the last two months that we know of due to fentanyl and—

Interjection.

Mr. James J. Bradley: Sounds like somebody over there wants credit.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Chief government whip, come to order. The member from Nepean–Carleton, second time.

Finish, please.

Mr. John Fraser: —due to fentanyl and opioid overdoses, and those are the ones we know about.

There were a lot of very sad stories last night. One father, Mike, was telling the story of his son, who has been addicted for five years. This is the message he sent to all of us here: "This is new. This is not"—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Question?

Mr. John Fraser: Fentanyl is extremely dangerous. What I want to know from the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services is, what are we doing to get this off the streets?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I guess my letter is in the mail.

L'hon. Marie-France Lalonde: Merci, monsieur le Président—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. The member from Nepean–Carleton is warned.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And I don't need anyone else interjecting.

Minister?

L'hon. Marie-France Lalonde: J'aimerais remercier le membre d'Ottawa-Sud, mais aussi la députée de Nepean–Carleton pour le travail sur ce dossier et d'avoir amené ça ici en Chambre—to have brought this to light today.

My colleague was telling me about some of the stories he heard yesterday, and I would like us to not take this on a partisan approach. We know it's something that was in Ottawa yesterday. We also know it's across all of our province. I will explain a little bit what we're doing and how I'm reaching out to our chiefs of police.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. John Fraser: I thank the minister, and I cannot stress the urgency with which that work needs to be done.

What Mike said last night was, "This is a different drug. One pill can kill you. The second pill can kill you. The third pill destroys you."

1110

My follow-up question is, what are we doing to make sure that we put Naloxone in the hands of our first responders?

Hon. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you to the member again for his question.

We recently made some changes to enable all paramedics to administer Naloxone on-site. I want to say thank you for the great work they do, but also for the tremendous work our police services have been doing in getting opioids off the streets.

I know they need help to do better. Ontario's chiefs of police have reached out to me to support our government. I will work with them and their police services to address the opioid addiction crisis.

I want to reach out to all the parents in Ontario today in profound respect. We will not abandon them. We will be there for them, Mr. Speaker.

ENERGY CONTRACTS

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. We all know about the Minister of Energy's mea culpa and hindsight, but the Auditor General found that Liberals ignored the advice of their own energy experts when handing out 20-year contracts to Liberal friends. If they had listened to the Auditor General, it could have saved Ontario \$4 billion.

We also know that the 30 big renewable companies donated \$1.3 million to the Ontario Liberal Party. My question to the Premier is: Given this hindsight, given this regret about these bad contracts, will the Ontario Liberal Party return the \$1.3 million in donations?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm pleased to rise. Investing in eliminating coal and building transmission, as the Leader of the Opposition talked about, was the right thing to do. Because of our foresight, we have a clean, reliable system that we can depend on. As I said in my speech, yes, hindsight is 20/20. The "what" was correct, but not the "how."

But I know the Leader of the Opposition knows hindsight very well because when it came to the updated sex-ed curriculum, he actually used hindsight and changed his mind, because they didn't support it and then they did support it. Then he wrote a letter not supporting it and then he supported it again. Hindsight is something that they know very well.

We've recognized on this side that we actually have invested in a system, built a system that is very strong. We will continue to find ways of lowering rates for—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Chatham-Kent-Essex will come to order.

Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier: I asked a serious question about hydro. The government has acknowledged that their Green Energy Act was a mistake; they signed bad contracts. The response I get from the Minister of Energy is a smear on an unrelated topic.

So I will try again, Mr. Speaker. Directly to the Premier: How does the Premier reconcile the fact that we've overpaid massively for renewable energy; that if we had listened to the Auditor General, we could have saved Ontarians \$4 billion on their hydro bills; and that the Ontario Liberal Party received \$1.3 million in donations? A very clear question: Given this acknowledgement, given this *mea culpa*, will the Premier ensure the Ontario Liberal Party returns the \$1.3 million to Ontario rate-payers because of these bad contracts?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Again, the Green Energy Act, the "what," was the absolute right thing to do. On how these contracts were negotiated, we of course could do better.

That's what we're actually doing. We're finding ways of doing better for the people of Ontario and bringing forward a rate mitigation process that's going to help all families and all businesses across the province.

When talking about savings for people, we've already done that and we're going to continue to do that. The renegotiated Samsung agreement was \$3.7 billion in savings; reduced FIT prices were \$1.9 billion in saving; the LRP process saved \$1.5 billion and the reduced FIT cost was \$800 million. We've continued to do this, while at the same time eliminating coal and rebuilding a system that they couldn't care for, that they left in shambles.

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier. Chris and Robina Willis live in London West with their five children. Both have jobs but, like too many working families, they are struggling to keep the lights on. Any time they fall behind on their hydro bills, they must pay hefty fees and a larger deposit, leading to bills as high as \$1,000 and forcing them to cut back on necessities. As hydro rates increase, this vicious circle just gets worse.

Why is the Premier ignoring the crisis faced by families like Chris and Robina Willis and refusing to act now to keep hydro costs affordable?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We have already begun to take action, and we are bringing forward a plan that will continue to take action in the immediate term.

What's interesting about the questions from the NDP is that the document they brought out yesterday lays out a number of initiatives, most of which wouldn't reduce electricity prices, and none of which would reduce electricity prices in the immediate term. It would take a very long time, and some of them—I have no idea how they would do it, in terms of, for example, asking the federal government to take action and forgo revenue.

We're going to bring forward a workable plan. We're going to bring forward an initiative that builds on the actions that we've already taken—

Hon. Michael Coteau: A real plan.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —a real plan that will reduce electricity prices immediately.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Speaker, Chris and Robina Willis are doing everything they can to keep up. They have had to use the food bank multiple times. They have removed their children from extracurricular activities. Now they say they will no longer be able to organize birthday parties for their children.

Speaker, does this government think it is fair to make children pay the price for their failure to take real action on hydro rates?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I think everyone in this House would agree that it's unacceptable that any family would have to do that. That's why we acted and we're continuing to act.

When we brought forward the 8% reduction, that's helping five million families across the province, with small businesses and farms included in that. But we know that more needs to be done. That's why we're continuing right now to work and to find ways to help families.

We know that we had to rebuild that system. It was paramount for us to eliminate coal, to make sure that we can have a system that's clean and reliable. But we will take it to the next level. We will work hard to ensure that we make this as affordable as possible for every family and for every business right across our province, from Windsor to Ottawa to Kenora and everything in between. We're working for everyone in this province.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: My question is for the Attorney General. I know that many Ontarians are aware of what happened last summer with The Tragically Hip's farewell tour. A huge number of Hip fans, especially those in my riding of Kingston and the Islands, could not get tickets to see Canada's iconic band. In a matter of seconds, across the province, tickets were sold out, and they later appeared on the secondary market at very inflated rates.

This happens with concerts, sporting events and all kinds of other cultural events, where fans have trouble

getting tickets, no matter how hard they try. This is why I introduced Bill 22, the Ticket Speculation Amendment Act, last fall. I was delighted that my PMB was supported unanimously, and I'm pleased to be working with the Attorney General to increase consumer protection measures for fans all across this province.

I know that our government agrees that we need to take action. Can the Attorney General please tell us about our government's plan?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I want to thank the member from Kingston and the Islands for her leadership on this important issue. As she mentioned, she brought a private member's bill to make sure that fans do get access to tickets that are affordable and accessible, and in a transparent way.

What we saw happen last summer with The Tragically Hip's farewell tour, I think—where people were not able to get tickets or, if tickets were available, they were available at a much higher price—bugged many Ontarians. It really disturbed me. That is why we have announced our intention to take concrete steps by bringing legislation this spring that will make sure that we are putting fans first in Ontario, that we are making sure that tickets are accessible and affordable for fans.

We are working and building on the member's private member's bill in terms of scalper bots. In the supplementary, I'll give you more information in that regard.

1120

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I would like to thank the Attorney General for his response. Many constituents and fans across the province are pleased to hear that the government is committed to taking action on this issue. By banning scalper bots, our government is sending a clear message to fans that we believe they deserve a fair shot at buying tickets.

I'm excited to be co-hosting a ticket speculation fan round table at Ryerson Digital Media Zone tomorrow at 7 o'clock to hear from fans. I know that constituents from all across this province are very happy with the work already under way to give everyone a fair chance, especially when the next big show comes to town.

I know the Attorney General would agree that we need to increase transparency in the ticket-selling industry. While this is going to be a difficult task, would the Attorney General please tell us more about our government's plan to ban scalper bots and the work we will be doing in the coming months?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Again, I want to thank the member from Kingston and the Islands for her leadership. I very much look forward to joining her tomorrow at the Ryerson University Digital Media Zone for our consultation with fans. We invite people to attend that event at 7 p.m.

Earlier today, we also launched an online survey at ontario.ca/tickets. We encourage Ontarians to please go online and give us advice in four key areas. How can we make access to tickets more easy by giving everybody a fair shot at buying tickets? How can we make them more

affordable? How can we make information about tickets more transparent? And of course, how can we make sure that these rules are fully enforced?

This is a challenging task. There is no silver-bullet answer. We are working with other jurisdictions, like New York state, which have the same kind of challenges to see if we can develop strategies that could be mutually enforceable. I look forward to working with members and Ontarians on this.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Minister of the Environment. In October 2016, the Environmental Review Tribunal ruled that the appellants of the WPD wind turbine project in Clearview township had proven the turbines would cause harm to human health and irreversible harm to the natural environment, in particular to endangered bats that live in the area.

Now WPD is requesting a remedy hearing in the hopes of reversing the tribunal's ruling that safeguards the people and wildlife of this province. Why is WPD Canada being given a remedy hearing when the fact of the matter is that the government's freedom-of-information records show that existing operational wind turbines in Ontario far exceed the approval limits for bat and bird kills?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to meet with the member opposite, within the authority I have, to review the matter. The minister has limits on our authority because we have an Environmental Review Tribunal, which I have a great deal of faith in.

You may remember, Mr. Speaker, that the member opposite repeatedly questioned me about the Collingwood airport issue. I said I cannot insert myself in that because I legally have no authority to do it, and I would probably have to resign if I did that.

It's interesting that the hearing resulted in changes made by the ERT with no interference from the government or the ministry, and I think somewhat to the satisfaction of the member opposite. Let's have some faith in our independent tribunal process.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Back to the minister. Minister, it's your policy that your tribunal is following. It's your Green Energy Act the tribunal is following. So you are ultimately responsible for this issue.

It has been proven that wind turbines kill resident bats and also attract migratory bats and kill them as well. Local residents and governments are spending excessive amounts of their own money doing what the minister should be doing, and that's enforcing the Endangered Species Act by refusing to issue permits to high-risk wind turbine projects.

This government's Green Energy Act is creating energy poverty with the high cost of electricity, and it's now bringing about project poverty by forcing citizens to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to oppose wind turbine projects and protect the environment. Is the min-

ister committed to protecting Ontario's endangered species, or do wind turbine projects take priority?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I would be very clear that we have, with the Endangered Species Act and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, very strong protections. As a matter of fact, we have the strongest protections in North America on endangered species.

I would also point out that we and Quebec and Nova Scotia are the only jurisdictions in the Americas that have greenhouse gas reductions below 1990 levels or have met the Kyoto Protocol, which his party took us out of. Our energy system now and our environmental strategies have left us as one of only three jurisdictions in the Americas that have below 1990 levels and tracking on that. Given the leader of his party and his colleagues, who have a track record of destroying international agreements, undermining them, increasing pollution in this province and increasing greenhouse gas emissions—it would do a lot more damage than to just the bats.

HYDRO RATES

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Premier. For people living in Windsor, like Mary, even the most basic services are more and more out of reach. I'm not talking about luxuries: Mary doesn't have a pool, a hot tub or even a dishwasher. As she says, "It's just basic living." The price for basic living? A \$200 electricity bill, double what she was paying last year.

Will this Liberal government listen to Mary, finally admit that electricity is a necessity, not a luxury, and begin to treat it that way?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: We continue to find ways to help people like Mary, and every other family and person and business in this province. We did start, starting on January 1 with the 8% reduction for those R2 customers in the province—330,000 households. They're seeing a \$60.50 reduction.

We know we can do more. There are programs in place to help people like Mary. I do hope that Mary is looking at some of those programs. But we will find ways. We are working hard right now to continue to find ways to reduce cost.

We do recognize that the system that we built—eliminating coal, rebuilding the grid—cost billions of dollars. We know that cost actually came at the expense of many families. That's why we are now looking at ways of ensuring that we can continue to find some downward pressure on rates and bring immediate action and relief.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Again to the Premier: Not a day goes by in Windsor where I don't hear yet another hydro horror story. Parents can't buy school supplies for their children, enroll them in sports or send them to summer camp, all because of their skyrocketing hydro bills. Businesses can't afford to expand. Some have already closed.

I invite the Premier to come to Windsor and actually listen to how difficult it's becoming to afford even the

most basic needs like hydro, food or medication for seniors. I'll introduce her to my constituents. I'll even buy her lunch. People in Windsor need action, not more Liberal talking points. They need more than \$5 off this month and maybe \$6 off the next.

Will this Liberal government end the sell-off of Hydro One and offer a real plan to lower electricity bills?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Once again, Mr. Speaker, as we said, there are several programs in place that actually help these families significantly in terms of dollars that they're saving every month when it comes to their electricity bill. We're also making sure, as I said before, that the 8% reduction that started as of January 1—that's a significant reduction for many families and farms and businesses right across the province. That took effect as of January 1. Many of those families are now seeing the full benefit of that, now that we're at the end of February.

We recognize that the investments that we made in this system—making sure that we're off coal, making sure that we have a clean system, a reliable system and one that we could count on—came with a cost. Now we're taking it to the next level. We're working hard on finding other ways that we can reduce costs for not only this family, as was mentioned, but all families and businesses right across our great province.

HOMELESSNESS

Ms. Harinder Malhi: My question is to the Minister of Housing and the minister responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy. I'm proud that our government has committed to end chronic homelessness by 2025. We recognize that all of us have a shared responsibility to the most vulnerable amongst us in the communities that we call home.

I'm pleased to see that our government has significantly increased the region of Peel's support from Ontario's Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative.

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CHPI helps thousands of at-risk families and individuals retain and find secure housing and allows them to build healthy and stable lives. This year, Peel is receiving \$15.3 million from CHPI. By 2018-19, this investment in homelessness prevention in Peel will grow to \$17.8 million. Mr. Speaker, this is great news.

Can the minister please tell this House how the CHPI increases will help ensure that all Ontarians are given the supports that they deserve?

Hon. Chris Ballard: Thank you to the hard-working member for Brampton—Springdale for that great question. I'm proud to say that Ontario is a leader in the fight against homelessness. To reach our goal of ending chronic homelessness, we're focusing on prevention.

I can report that all areas of Ontario received an increase in Community Homeless Prevention Initiative—we call it CHPI—funding this year. Significantly increased funding in Durham, York, Peel, Halton regions and other communities will help these service managers better support the needs right across their communities.

This funding will decrease the need for people to migrate to Toronto to seek service.

CHPI provides services people need to rebuild their lives, like housing, transportation assistance and life skills coaching. We're investing more and more every year in all communities in Ontario to help them fight homelessness in their streets.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Harinder Malhi: I'm glad to see that Ontario is taking strong action by empowering municipalities across the province in the fight against homelessness. I want to take this time and recognize the many frontline staff who demonstrate the strength of our community in supporting our most vulnerable in my riding of Brampton—Springdale. A community isn't a bunch of people living in the same place; it's a shared sense of responsibility to one another and both our successes and our struggles bind us together.

Even still, we know that more work need to be done. Can the minister explain to this House what the government is doing to encourage the community leadership and ensure wraparound solutions to those who need our help the most?

Hon. Chris Ballard: Again, thank you to the member for the question and to our municipal partners across Ontario who are working hard to end homelessness. We began our work by striking an expert panel on homelessness and used their input to shape our path and the path forward.

We're focusing our efforts to prevent homelessness on those most at risk, including the chronically homeless, youth, indigenous people and individuals transitioning out of provincial institutions. We know that chronic homelessness is a serious symptom of other obstacles, like drug addiction, mental health challenges and disabilities.

In the coming weeks, we're moving forward with an unprecedented investment in housing with supports to help eliminate the obstacles that keep people in a cycle of homelessness, freeing them to rebuild their lives and maintain stable homes. I really look forward to sharing the details soon.

ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Mr. Steve Clark: My question for the Minister of the Environment. I want to replay the facts. In February, the Minister of the Environment announced the \$14,000 Tesla luxury car rebate. I have the press release right here to prove it. It's supposedly a part of his action plan.

Around the same time, the minister's former chief of staff started working at Tesla. But then the minister claims his office had nothing with the decision; it was the Minister of Transportation. My question is simple. Yes or no: Did the Minister of the Environment's office participate in the luxury car rebate program?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I think we've been very clear on this. It was last spring that the decisions were made, and they were made by the government, that the Ministry

of Transportation is the administrative unit. They developed the program.

The person involved, the staffer, did exactly what I would want—and what I think we'd want—our staffers to do. They immediately, upon looking to leave government, went to the Integrity Commissioner and met with the Integrity Commissioner. I got a letter that was copied on that. The Integrity Commissioner said that they followed all of the rules. I would hope that we would have respect for people who follow the rules, which was the case here, and that should end it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Steve Clark: Again, I want to reiterate: This press release from the government on this program change came from his ministry, the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change. It's time for this government to put their money where their mouth is—maybe their emails where their mouth is. I filed an order paper question. I can go under freedom of information, but I'm going to ask the minister this question: Will he release all the emails that contain the word "Tesla" that were issued by his former chief of staff, yes or no?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I will say it again: This decision was made by the government last spring, clearly made by the government.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: It was this month.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: The decision was made last spring.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Will you release the emails?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke is warned. The member from Nipissing will come to order.

Finish, please.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Again, when the political staffer involved decided to leave government, he did what every political staffer should do: He went and met with the Integrity Commissioner, did a full disclosure, then got a letter back giving him complete clearance and rules to follow. He followed those rules. Again, the—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is for the Premier. The Horne Granite Curling Club is a cornerstone in the community of New Liskeard, as are many curling clubs and ice rinks. Tragically, a few years ago it burned to the ground. Through the dedication of its members and support from the community, it was totally rebuilt. It's totally modern. It faced a huge challenge.

Now it faces an even greater challenge. Last year the membership fees for the Horne Granite Curling Club were \$42,000. Their hydro bill was \$46,000, so you know where that's going. How is it that we've come to this, that our rural way of life is being destroyed by your hydro policies?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: It is a great day to talk about curling. I know Sudbury has a great curling club as well. The Copper Cliff Curling Club have come to me and talked to me about their electricity bill. And do you know what I did? I put them in touch with their local utility, their local utility that went in and worked with them on the saveONenergy program. The saveONenergy program is now saving that curling club thousands of dollars every month.

I encourage that member to utilize the local utilities that are within your area. Use the programs that are in place, because we rebuilt this system, we've made sure it's clean, and now we're making sure it's affordable for every single business and for every single person in this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. John Vanthof: Minister, with all due respect, this example—it's a brand new facility. They've done everything that they could to save energy. They have worked with every program available, as have most people in this province. Anyone who comes in our office, we make sure that we look for every program available. Yet this club and many others like it are in danger of closing because they can't pay their hydro bills.

The real question is, your ministry has policy analysts, experts, long-term energy plans: How did you not foresee this happening? Why did it have to come to a crisis before you realized that, "Oh, the people in rural Ontario can't pay their hydro bills? Oh, perhaps we have to do something"? How did it come to this with your energy programs?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: It came to this because for decades the opposition parties, when they were in power, never invested in the system. It was up to us to rebuild it, and that doesn't happen overnight. We've rebuilt the system. We've made sure it's clean, we've made sure it's green, and now we've made sure that we've got a system that we can rely on.

We're going to continue to work hard for the folks who are in rural parts of our province. We've started with the \$60.50 RRRP reduction. We're going to continue to find ways of finding programs that will help these organizations, just like we did in Sudbury, just like we've done in Thunder Bay, just like we've done right across our great province. We will continue to find ways to help, not only in rural but in urban parts of our province, Mr. Speaker.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member from Leeds-Grenville has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of the Environment and

Climate Change concerning the electric car rebate program. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1140 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I know that they're making their way into the public galleries, but I rise to welcome the men and women here today from the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, better known as CIJA. I welcome them here to Queen's Park today and encourage all members of this House to join them at their reception this evening at the Windsor Arms Hotel.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Bill Walker: I rise to recognize Black History Month on behalf of my constituents in Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. Black citizens have been part of Grey county since the first non-native settlers arrived in the northern Queen's Bush. Some of these early pioneers were born in Canada, while others had only recently escaped slavery in the upper south. As a northernmost refuge for the slaves fleeing the southern states, Owen Sound and the village of Sydenham were the last terminal of the railroad where many of them escaped, eventually settling down to work and raise families.

After a long and difficult journey to freedom, escaped slaves experienced continuing challenges. Insecurity and uncertainty in border cities often propelled people to move further north into Ontario, or what later would become Ontario. John Hall, one of Grey county's most prominent early black citizens, was born in Amherstburg, Ontario, sometime in the late 1700s and was captured as a young man during the War of 1812. Ultimately, Hall passed into slavery. After 13 years as a slave, he escaped by the Underground Railroad to southern Ontario, later making his way to the Durham and Rocky Saugeen area in the 1840s. He then moved to Owen Sound, living a long life there, where he was well known as the town crier. Hall died in 1900.

Robert Sutherland, Canada's first black lawyer as well as the first-known university student and graduate of colour in Canada, was called to the bar in 1855. He practised law at Walkerton in Bruce county for over two decades. A graduate of Queen's University, at his death in 1878 he left his estate to the university, which remains thankful to Sutherland as a benefactor at an important time in their early history.

My riding has been commemorating black history with the Emancipation Festival, the longest-running emancipation celebration in North America, established pre-Confederation and pre-Ontario in 1862. I invite the

members to join us in the Owen Sound area and Grey Roots Museum and Archives on August 5, when we will mark the 155th annual event.

PUBLIC SERVICES

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It is my pleasure to rise today and speak about a very important topic, which is our public assets and our public services. I recently had an opportunity to visit an elementary school in my riding, along with OPSEU members. We went to the school to talk about their We Own It campaign, where they're talking about the importance of public services.

I'd like to start by thanking Rob Wilson, who is an organizer for OPSEU and the one who organized the event; Jordan McGrail, Amanda Picott and Sue Fairweather—they're all organizers with OPSEU; Jen Wilson, an educational assistant at West Gate Public School; Mark Roth, who is the vice-principal at West Gate Public School; and Debra Laforet, the principal of West Gate Public School.

OPSEU had run a campaign where they went into West Gate Public School and gave the children an opportunity to colour pictures and write about what they think is so important about our public services. I won't have time to share most of what these kids have written, but they have stressed the importance of our police, our firefighters, our doctors, our nurses, and our health care system as a whole. They talked about the importance of the education workers in our education system and of respecting the education workers.

The one I really want to highlight was Gavin. Gavin wrote, "I think hydro is most important because all food would go raw and also it would be dark." Gavin is in grade 4 or grade 5, and he recognizes how important hydro is in this province.

TRIP TO ISRAEL

Mrs. Cristina Martins: During the winter recess, I was able to join a number of MPPs from all sides of the House on a fact-finding mission to Israel, hosted by the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs—CIJA—a number of whose members have joined us here today and are here in the gallery as well.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, Ontario and Israel have always had a special friendship. In fact, just last year, the Premier travelled to Israel and other parts of the Middle East on a trade mission that resulted in 44 agreements and totalled \$180 million. On our trip, I had the opportunity to speak with some of the companies who were keen to find partners in Ontario and continue to strengthen the relationship that Ontario has with Israeli friends.

Possibly the most moving portion of the trip for me, aside from visiting the Christian holy sites, was the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial museum. It commemorates the truly horrific experience of the Jewish people during the Holocaust and the resolve that they showed to survive

and emerge as a stronger people. The museum is a lasting reminder to their sacrifice, one we shall never forget.

Over the course of our eight-day trip, we travelled to Jerusalem, the Dead Sea, and Tel Aviv, seeing a variety of important cultural and historical landmarks.

I want to extend thanks to our guide, Lyana Rotstein, who was able to provide context and explain the significance of the magnificent sites that we visited. I also want to thank Madi Murariu and Sara Lefton from CIJA for their kind invitation to be part of this intense learning experience, as well as Rachel Chertkoff from CJPAC for taking the time to meet with us. I look forward to my next visit to Israel.

D.J. KENNINGTON

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm pleased to rise today and congratulate D.J. Kennington. D.J. is a constituent of mine and a professional stock car driver. D.J. is the first Canadian to drive in the Daytona 500 in 29 years. As I watched the race on Sunday, I was disheartened when he was caught in a 16-car wreck at the Daytona International Speedway. It was a sudden, unexpected pileup that knocked many out of contention. Regardless of Sunday's results, D.J. did make our constituency proud.

Kennington was the first Canadian at the great American race since Trevor Boys in 1988, and will go down as one of only eight Canadian drivers in history to date. Daytona 500 was Kennington's second Monster Energy Cup race of his life. The first was in Phoenix, last November, when he finished 35th. He's a veteran of the Xfinity Series races and some Camping World Truck Series contests. Most of Kennington's success has come at home at the NASCAR Pinty's Series, where he has won two national Canadian championships. We look forward to seeing D.J. race again as part of the Pinty's series at the Delaware Speedway on June 3.

D.J., you have made our community proud. I know that I, along with thousands of others across St. Thomas, Elgin county and Canada, were cheering you on Sunday afternoon. D.J., you have proven that you belong at the Daytona 500.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: Today I want to share a very hard but real example of what happens when the Ministry of Health freezes funding to our hospitals for four years straight. What happens is that our hospitals are forced to make some really hard decisions in order to balance their budgets.

In Sudbury, the hospital had to make the difficult decision to outsource its laundry service right out of our region. What does that mean? Well, by the numbers, it means that 42 people will lose their jobs, \$1.3 million in wages will be lost to our community, and the overall economic impact to the city will be a \$6.5-million loss.

Those are the numbers, but what about the effect on people? The 42 laundry workers, mainly women, are, on

average, in their late forties or early fifties. They are losing family-sustaining jobs with benefits and pensions. Sudbury has had one of the highest unemployment rates in the province for years now. The future job prospects for these women are bleak.

Second, and just as importantly, is the relationship between the community and our hospital. Over 90% of residents said that they oppose this decision and want the jobs to remain local. This impacts the perception residents have of the hospital. No matter how good the care is, fundraising will be harder, and nothing good comes of that.

I always thought the Ministry of Health was there to improve the health of people in our community, but by their actions, they have done just the opposite. The laundry workers in Sudbury are paying the price for ill-advised Liberal policy. They are losing their livelihoods, and that's wrong.

FAMILY SKATE

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Recently, my constituency office team and I hosted our third annual Family Day skate event at the Kitchener auditorium. The turnout was beyond our expectations. We had about 500 people show up. This year we tripled our cookie order but still ran out.

Many people told me that they've come to really appreciate this free event on Family Day. It's a chance to connect with family and friends, to get some exercise and, for some, it's a chance to feel Canadian.

A woman in her forties by the name of Dalia, from Colombia, was there skating for the very first time and she managed to stay vertical for most of the day.

1510

Syrian-born brothers Mohammed and Abryham were back again this year. These newcomers were sponsored by one of my neighbours. They were much steadier on the ice and their English is really coming along.

Speaker, I know how they feel. As the child of Italian immigrants, at the age of eight I begged my mother for a pair of skates. She reluctantly agreed to buy me some used skates at a church rummage sale for a quarter, and I was able to join the neighbourhood kids at a local outdoor rink. Enjoying a crisp winter day, learning how to glide on the ice, was perhaps the first time that I truly felt Canadian.

Speaker, it's activities like this that create lifelong memories, unite us as a community and teach us the value of fitness. I was really proud to once again host such a successful event. I look forward to lacing up again next year, and I promise to anyone who is going to attend: We're going to have enough cookies next year. Thank you.

INFRASTRUCTURE RENEWAL

Mr. Steve Clark: I rise on behalf of the village of Westport residents devastated that the village's Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund application was rejected.

It's the second straight February this government has denied funding essential to modernize Westport's failing waste water treatment system.

I can't emphasize enough how critical this project is not only to the village's future, but to public health and the environment on the UNESCO World Heritage Rideau Canal waterway. No other municipality of this size, with fewer than 700 residents, faces an infrastructure problem of this magnitude.

Despite the village's small size, I'm so proud of how tall residents and council under Mayor Robin Jones have stood in facing this crisis. A Save Our Village campaign was launched to fundraise for projects like arena upgrades and a new park. They raised more than \$150,000, allowing council to focus tax dollars on its responsibility to this new waste water facility. This incredible response shows Westport isn't sitting back waiting for someone else to fix the problem. They are doing their part, but can't complete a multi-million dollar project alone, nor should they be expected to.

Provincial infrastructure programs exist to ensure projects like this one can get done. I call on the Ministers of Municipal Affairs and of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to personally review this misguided decision. Come to Westport, see what the residents have done, and step up to the plate.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Vic Dhillon: Brampton is one of the fastest-growing cities in Canada. As such, a growing city needs expansion in its essential services. Health care is at the top of the list.

Several years ago, the William Osler health care system opened the doors to a brand new Brampton Civic Hospital. Because of the rapid growth, Brampton Civic Hospital was under immense pressure, for which reason we needed a new health care facility. That is why, on February 7 of this year, our government opened the doors to a new urgent care centre at the Peel Memorial Centre for Integrated Health and Wellness in my riding of Brampton West. This facility is staffed by trained physicians and health care professionals. The urgent care centre is intended for non-life-threatening illnesses or injuries that don't require immediate surgery or an overnight stay. No referral or appointment is required. The urgent care centre will ease the emergency room pressures at Brampton Civic Hospital. This brand new facility is open from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., 365 days a year.

This is a big boost for health care in our community. I look forward to this April, when we finally open the doors for the grand opening of the entire facility.

JANET ECKER

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Today I'd like to recognize another Huron-Bruce native, former member of provincial Parliament Janet Ecker, who was raised in Exeter and is one of 100 appointees to the Order of Canada this

year. The award was created in 1967 and is one of our nation's highest civilian honours, recognizing outstanding achievements, dedication to community, and service to the nation.

This year marks the 50th anniversary since the inception of the award, coinciding with Canada's and Ontario's 150th and also the 100th anniversary of women earning the vote in Ontario.

Janet is truly committed to public service, which is evident through her many great contributions to Ontario's political landscape, having served as the MPP for Durham West and Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge between 1995 and 2003. Her parliamentary service includes Minister of Community and Social Services, Minister of Education and Minister of Finance.

She was instrumental in bringing about several pieces of education legislation that ensured our schools remained safe environments for students and promoted quality education practices. Utilizing her considerable expertise, she also presented a balanced budget designed to put our province on the path to prosperity and economic growth.

In an article in the Ajax News Advertiser, the publication that serves her current home of Ajax, she shared her thoughts on being selected as a recipient, saying, "I'm excited, but I'm quite humble. Those are phenomenal people they have on the list." But truly, she belongs there.

Congratulations, Janet. You are an inspiration and truly deserving of this honour.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received a report on intended appointments dated February 20, 2017, from the Standing Committee on Government Agencies.

Pursuant to standing order 108(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. Granville Anderson: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on General Government and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. William Short): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill 27, An Act to reduce the regulatory burden on business, to enact various new Acts and to make other amendments and repeals / Projet de loi 27, Loi visant à alléger le fardeau réglementaire des entreprises, à édicter diverses lois et à modifier et abroger d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to the order of the House dated February 21, 2017, the bill is ordered for third reading.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

MAGNA CARTA DAY ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 SUR LE JOUR DE LA GRANDE CHARTE

Mrs. Munro moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 97, An Act to proclaim Magna Carta Day / Projet de loi 97, Loi proclamant le Jour de la Grande Charte.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mrs. Julia Munro: This bill proclaims June 15 in each year as Magna Carta Day.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I love those short explanatory notes. They're my favourite.

CHILD CARE AND EARLY YEARS AMENDMENT ACT (NOT-FOR-PROFIT CORPORATIONS), 2017

LOI DE 2017 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA GARDE D'ENFANTS ET LA PETITE ENFANCE (ORGANISATIONS SANS BUT LUCRATIF)

Ms. Fife moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 98, An Act to amend the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 to limit funding of child care and early years programs and services to not-for-profit corporations / Projet de loi 98, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2014 sur la garde d'enfants et la petite enfance en vue de restreindre le financement des programmes et services pour la garde d'enfants et la petite enfance aux organisations sans but lucratif.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Ms. Catherine Fife: This bill amends the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014, so that corporations are not eligible to receive funding for child care and early years programs and services unless they are not-for-profit corporations.

PETITIONS

PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

Ms. Laurie Scott: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government needs to strengthen primary care as the foundation of the health care system to achieve health system transformation goals of Patients First; and

"Whereas research shows that interprofessional primary health care delivers better outcomes for people and better value for money; and

"Whereas an investment in primary care will help address recruitment and retention challenges, build strong interprofessional primary care teams and ensure high-quality people-centred primary health care delivery in Ontario; and

"Whereas over 7,500 staff in over 400 community health centres, family health teams, aboriginal health access centres and nurse practitioner-led clinics are being paid below rates recommended in 2012 and as a result are facing challenges recruiting and retaining health providers, including chiropodists, nurse practitioners, dietitians, registered nurses, registered practical nurses, health promoters, occupational therapists, psychologists, pharmacists, respiratory therapists, chiropractors, physiotherapists, mental health and social workers, physician assistants, managers and administration;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to invest in interprofessional primary health care teams with a commitment of \$130 million annualized, with an implementation plan over two years, to ensure interprofessional primary health care teams can effectively retain and recruit staff."

This was brought to me by Mike Perry and many family health teams in my riding.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: "Hydro One Not for Sale! Say No to Privatization.

"Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the provincial government is creating a privatization scheme that will lead to higher hydro rates, lower reliability, and hundreds of millions less for our schools, roads, and hospitals; and

"Whereas the privatization scheme will be particularly harmful to northern and First Nations communities; and

"Whereas the provincial government is creating this privatization scheme under a veil of secrecy that means Ontarians don't have a say on a change that will affect their lives dramatically; and

"Whereas it is not too late to cancel the scheme;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario government "immediately cancel its scheme to privatize Ontario's Hydro One."

I sign this petition and give it to Azaria to deliver.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas payday loans are the most expensive source of credit in Canada and can create the risk of an additional financial burden for the 3% of Ontario households that borrow payday loans; and

"Whereas in Ontario a two-week payday loan carries an annualized interest rate of approximately 547.5%; and

"Whereas these loans are typically marketed to financially vulnerable consumers;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:"

That the Ontario government mandate incrementally to "reduce the cost of borrowing a payday loan, first to \$18 per \$100 advanced in 2017 and then to \$15 per \$100 advanced in 2018."

I am pleased to sign this petition and to send it down with page Nolan.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Bill Walker: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas household electricity bills have skyrocketed by 56% and electricity rates have tripled as a result of the Liberal government's mismanagement of the energy sector;

"Whereas the billion-dollar gas plants cancellation, wasteful and unaccountable spending at Ontario Power Generation and the unaffordable subsidies in the Green Energy Act will result in electricity bills climbing by another 35% by 2017 and 45% by 2020; and

"Whereas the Liberal government wasted \$2 billion on the flawed smart meter program; and

"Whereas the recent announcement to implement the Ontario Electricity Support Program will see average household hydro bills increase an additional \$137 per year starting in 2016; and

"Whereas the soaring cost of electricity is straining family budgets, and hurting the ability of manufacturers and small businesses in the province to compete and create new jobs; and

"Whereas home heating and electricity are a necessity for families in Ontario who cannot afford to continue footing the bill for the government's mismanagement of the energy sector;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario" as follows: "To immediately implement policies ensuring Ontario's power consumers, including families, farmers and employers, have affordable and reliable electricity."

I fully support this, affix my signature and send with page Rowan.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Percy Hatfield: “Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas quality care for the 77,000 residents of long-term-care (LTC) homes is a priority for many Ontario families;

“Whereas over the last 10 years 50% of Ontario’s hospital-based complex continuing care beds have been closed by the provincial government; and, there has been a 29.7% increase in the acuity level of LTC residents and 73% of LTC residents in Ontario suffer from some form of Alzheimer’s or dementia;

“Whereas the provincial government does not provide adequate funding to ensure care and staffing levels in long-term-care homes keeps pace with residents’ increasing acuity and a growing number of residents with complex behaviours such as dementia and Alzheimer’s;

“Whereas there is extensive evidence that a care standard can result in increased staff levels, which translates into improved quality of care for residents;

“Whereas for over a decade several Ontario coroner’s inquests into nursing deaths have recommended an increase in direct hands-on care for residents and increase in staffing levels;

“Whereas the Ontario Liberal government first promised a legislated care standard for residents in the province’s long-term-care homes in 2003 but in 2013 they have yet to make good on their promise”—or 2014 or 2015 or 2016;

“Whereas the Long-Term Care Homes Act (2007) empowers the provincial government to create a minimum standard—but falls short of actually creating one;

“Whereas the most detailed and reputable study of minimum care standards recommends 4.1 hours of direct care per day; and

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“(1) An amendment must be made to the Long-Term Care Homes Act (2007) for a legislated care standard of a minimum four hours per resident each day adjusted for acuity level and case mix;

“(2) The province must increase funding in order for long-term-care homes to achieve a staffing and care standard and tie public funding for homes to the provision of quality care and staffing levels that meet the legislated minimum care standard of four hours;

“(3) To ensure accountability the province must make public reporting of staffing levels at each Ontario LTC home mandatory;

“(4) The province must immediately provide funding for specialized facilities for persons with cognitive impairment who have been assessed as potentially aggressive, and staff them with sufficient numbers of appropriately trained workers;

“(5) The province must stop closing complex continuing care beds and alternative-level-of-care beds to end the downloading of hospital patients with complex medical conditions to long-term-care homes.”

I agree. I’ll sign it and give it to Mary to take over to the desk.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. A petition filibuster; I never would have thought it.

The member from Etobicoke Centre.

ELEVATOR MAINTENANCE

Mr. Yvan Baker: This isn’t a filibuster, Speaker, I can assure you. I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas elevators are an important amenity for a resident of a high-rise residential building; and

“Whereas ensuring basic mobility and standards of living for residents remain top priority; and

“Whereas the unreasonable delay of repairs for elevator services across Ontario is a concern for all residents of high-rise buildings who experience constant breakdowns, mechanical failures and ‘out of service’ notices for unspecified amounts of time;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Urge the Ontario government to require repairs to elevators be completed within a reasonable and prescribed time frame. We urge this government to address these concerns that are shared by residents of Trinity-Spadina and across Ontario.”

I support this petition. I’m going to sign it and pass it to page Annissa.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

“Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

“Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients’ access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario’s doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario’s families deserve.”

I very much agree with this petition. I’ll affix my signature and send it to the table with Hailey.

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

Mr. Taras Natyshak: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads:

“Whereas Highway 3 from Windsor to Leamington has long been identified as dangerous and unable to meet growing traffic volumes; and

“Whereas the widening of this highway passed its environmental assessment in 2006; and

“Whereas the portion of this project from Windsor to west of the town of Essex has been completed, but the remainder of the project remains stalled; and

“Whereas there has been a recent announcement of plans to rebuild the roadway, culverts, lighting and signals along the portion of Highway 3 that has not yet been widened;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To revisit plans to rebuild Highway 3 from Essex to Leamington and direct those funds to the timely completion of the already approved widening of this important roadway in Essex county.”

I wholeheartedly agree, will affix my name to it and send it to the Clerk’s table via page Elizabeth-Anne.

GO TRANSIT

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have another petition that’s addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

“Whereas Cambridge, Ontario, is a municipality of over 125,000 people, many of whom commute into the greater Toronto area daily;

“Whereas the current commuting options available for travel between the Waterloo region and the GTA are inefficient and time-consuming, as well as environmentally damaging;

“Whereas the residents of Cambridge and the Waterloo region believe that they would be well-served by commuter rail transit that connects the region to the Milton line, and that this infrastructure would have positive, tangible economic benefits to the province of Ontario;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Direct crown agency Metrolinx to commission a feasibility study into building a rail line that connects the city of Cambridge to the GO train station in Milton, and to complete this study in a timely manner and communicate the results to the municipal government of Cambridge.”

I’m pleased to sign this petition and to send it down with page Radin.

AUTOMOTIVE DEALERS

Mr. Steve Clark: I want to thank Frank Notte from the Trillium Automobile Dealers Association for his recent op-ed in Canadian Auto World, and also the editorial in Automotive News Canada on this petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Bill 3, the Cutting Red Tape for Motor Vehicle Dealers Act, 2016, is a vital tool that supports

Ontario’s auto sector by cutting red tape for dealers and consumers when a vehicle is purchased or leased; and

“Whereas, in 2011, the province of Ontario conducted a pilot project on in-house vehicle licensing at two new car dealerships that was well received by the participants; and

“Whereas the province of Quebec has permitted automobile dealers to conduct in-house vehicle registrations since 2003, with 700 dealers currently participating;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the government of Ontario immediately pass Bill 3 into law, to promote Ontario’s auto retail sector by cutting red tape for motor vehicle dealers and consumers to save them time and money.”

I’m pleased to affix my signature. I’ll send it to the table with page Ismael.

DOG OWNERSHIP

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas currently the law takes the onus off of owners that raise violent dogs by making it appear that violence is a matter of genetics; and

“Whereas the Dog Owners’ Liability Act does not clearly define a pit bull, nor is it enforced equally across the province, as pit bulls are not an acknowledged breed;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the government supports a repeal of the 2005 breed-specific legislation.”

On behalf of the over 1,000 dogs that have been euthanized unfairly, I sign this and give it to Azaria to be delivered to the table.

DENTAL CARE

Ms. Laurie Scott: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Expand Public Dental Programs.

“Whereas lack of access to dental care affects overall health and well-being, and poor oral health is linked to diabetes, cardiovascular, respiratory disease, and Alzheimer’s disease; and

“Whereas it is estimated that two to three million people in Ontario have not seen a dentist in the past year, mainly due to the cost of private dental services; and

“Whereas approximately every nine minutes a person in Ontario arrives at a hospital emergency room with a dental problem but can only get painkillers and antibiotics, and this costs the health care system at least \$31 million annually with no treatment of the problem;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to invest in public oral health programs for low-income adults and seniors by:

“—ensuring that plans to reform the health care system include oral health so that vulnerable people in

our communities have equitable access to the dental care they need to be healthy;

“—extending public dental programs for low-income children and youth within the next two years to include low-income adults and seniors; and

“—delivering public dental services in a cost-efficient way through publicly funded dental clinics such as public health units, community health centres and aboriginal health access centres to ensure primary oral health services are accessible to vulnerable people in Ontario.”

Brought to me by the Ontario Oral Health Alliance—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. Further petitions? The member for Essex.

PRIVATISATION DES BIENS PUBLICS

M. Taras Natyshak: Merci, monsieur le Président—

M^{me} France Gélinas: I think I have half of it anyway.

M. Taras Natyshak: J'ai gagné.

C'est une pétition intitulée « Privatiser Hydro One : une autre mauvaise décision.

« À l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« Attendu que la privatisation d'Hydro One est un aller sans retour; et

« Attendu que nous allons perdre des centaines de millions de revenus fiables d'Hydro One pour nos écoles et nos hôpitaux; et

« Attendu que nous allons perdre le plus gros atout économique provincial et le contrôle de notre avenir dans le secteur de l'énergie; et

« Attendu que nous allons payer de plus en plus pour l'électricité, tout comme ce qui est arrivé ailleurs;

« Nous, soussignés, pétitionnons l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario comme suit :

« D'arrêter la vente d'Hydro One et de faire en sorte que les familles de l'Ontario, comme propriétaires d'Hydro One, en bénéficient, maintenant et pour les générations à venir. »

Je vous remercie pour votre appui, et j'appuie cette pétition aussi. Merci.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The time for petitions has now expired.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SCHOOL BOARDS COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AMENDMENT ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA NÉGOCIATION COLLECTIVE DANS LES CONSEILS SCOLAIRES

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 27, 2017, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 92, An Act to amend the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, 2014 and make related amendments to other statutes / Projet de loi 92, Loi

modifiant la Loi de 2014 sur la négociation collective dans les conseils scolaires et apportant des modifications connexes à d'autres lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It's my pleasure to add a few comments on the record about the School Boards Collective Bargaining Amendment Act.

A big part of the act is changing legislation to allow a contract's extension when there is agreement from both sides. The NDP has no problem with that. If there's agreement on both sides—from the employer side and from the union side—that makes sense. However, the bill includes many more changes, and many of them are divisive. I would even say many of them have been polarized already, and we all know where that will lead: That will lead to undermining future rounds of bargaining, and nothing good will come of that.

Let's face it, Speaker, there was a complete lack of consensus during the stakeholder consultation to develop these amendments. The time, the effort, the energy were never put into making sure that all the groups found common ground. There were a lot of ideas that were shared and there were a lot of requests that were made, but never the time, the effort, the energy to try to move it to the next level, to the level where we can start to develop broad consensus, to the level where you're ready to live with what's there—although it's not exactly what you wanted, but you're ready to live with it. None of that work was done.

The government basically went ahead and did what it has always done: put forward its own idea, because apparently they have all of the good ideas in the world. They're all on that side of the House, and none of us have any good ones. Well, we all know that that's not true. In this particular bill, there were a lot of good ideas that were put forward by the different stakeholders who took part. Very few of them were actually listened to.

What matters more than the structure within the collective bargaining is how the parties interact with each other at the bargaining table. We all know that collaborative bargaining is what brings us the best collective agreements, brings us labour peace, brings us—in this particular instance—good classrooms where our children have an opportunity to learn from teachers, educational assistants, etc., or even the people who clean and support the schools in an environment that is conducive to learning at their best.

I want to give some examples of those ideas that were shared but completely ignored. I'll start with l'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens, AEFO. The AEFO has made the government aware of many ideas for change. Many important lessons were learned from Bill 122, and they wanted change.

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For example, in this bill, Bill 92, the government intends to force unions representing support staff—they are the secretaries, the teachers' aides, the computer technicians etc.—to become members of provincial nego-

tiation organizations. However, as its members' bargaining agent, AEFO already represents them in an official and exclusive capacity. Why is it that the government would bring forward something like this when they already knew that it was going to be problematic?

They ask that any amendment to the act should lead to a more efficient process. I'm quoting directly from their president, Rémi Sabourin, who says, "There is no need to make it more cumbersome than it already is."

AEFO, like many other stakeholder unions and employers, is carefully reviewing the government-proposed changes.

J'aimerais également parler un peu d'autres préoccupations de l'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens. Non seulement sont-ils préoccupés par le fait qu'ils ne représentent pas seulement le personnel enseignant, mais ils représentent également du personnel de soutien pour les enseignants et tous ceux qui travaillent dans nos écoles scolaires, dans nos écoles francophones, que ce soit avec le conseil scolaire catholique ou public.

Les Franco-Ontariens et Franco-Ontariennes se sont battus pendant très longtemps pour venir à bout d'avoir, dans un premier temps, nos écoles francophones, et dans un deuxième temps, la gouvernance de ces écoles. Finalement, on en est venu à bout, et on en est très fier.

Là, le gouvernement libéral arrive avec ses gros sabots, puis dit, « On aura une table de négociation centrale. » Ça se fait dans bien d'autres secteurs. Moi, je viens du secteur de la santé. Je peux vous dire que, du côté des infirmières du côté de la santé, ça se fait assez régulièrement. Mais lorsque tu mets une table de négociation centrale—lorsque tu es en train de négocier une convention collective, le langage est au cœur de tes travaux. Le langage qui va être utilisé dans la convention collective va être lu, relu et analysé jusqu'à temps qu'on s'entende tous sur ce qu'on a voulu dire.

Les enseignants et enseignantes francophones et les syndicats qui les représentent vont être à une table de négociation anglophone. Comment peut-on développer une convention collective en français lorsque la table de négociation se réunit en anglais? On sait exactement où ça va mener, ça. Ça va mener à une traduction. La traduction en français, est-ce que ça va être le document sur lequel on se base pour faire le jour à jour, ou est-ce que ça va être sur le document en anglais?

Je peux vous garantir qu'un conseil scolaire francophone, avec des enseignants et enseignantes francophones, va se baser sur le document francophone, mais le document francophone va être un document qui va avoir été traduit. Peu importe comment bons ou bonnes seront les traducteurs, il y aura toujours place à l'interprétation.

Vous savez ce qui fait une bonne convention collective, monsieur le Président? C'est quand tu ne laisses pas de place à l'interprétation. Les conventions collectives qui sont ce qu'on appelle « matures », ce sont des conventions collectives où on a revu toutes les virgules, on a revu tous les points et on a revu toutes les phrases, et puis tout le monde s'entend pour dire, « Ça,

c'est exactement ce qu'on veut dire. » Ça, c'est une bonne convention collective sur laquelle tu as le moins de griefs possible, parce que, que ce soit un employé, que ce soit son représentant syndical ou que ce soit l'employeur qui la lise, ça va toujours tout dire la même chose.

Le gouvernement libéral dit que, « Les francophones, c'est bien important. On va vous faire une statue. » Mais c'est dans les actions qu'on parle bien plus fort que dans les mots. Dans les actions, quand tu demandes à un conseil scolaire francophone qui s'est battu pour venir à bout d'exister, quand tu demandes à un syndicat qui représente des professeurs, des enseignants et des enseignantes francophones de négocier centralement en anglais, qu'est-ce que tu es en train de dire?

Tu es en train de dire que vraiment, le français, on s'en fout. Que la langue de la majorité en Ontario, c'est l'anglais. Puis que, « Les francophones, que vous vous soyez battus tout ce temps-là pour venir à bout d'avoir l'éducation en français, tu sais, là, c'est correct, mais vraiment, c'est en anglais que ça fonctionne ici. » Ce n'est pas correct. Puis ce n'est pas comme si c'est moi qui l'apporte. On a une lettre après une autre qui nous dit exactement la même chose. Dans le processus de discussion qui s'est passé—je vais vous le dire en anglais :

“French-language capacity and supports: A significant focus of the consultation centred on the unique needs of the French-language central parties, and how to ensure that future central negotiations could be conducted entirely in French. Suggestions to ensure the specific language of labour relations is understood in both languages include,” and they give three examples:

—“increasing the fluent, French-language labour relations capacity of the Ministry of Education at the staff and senior management levels;

—“ensuring that quick, accurate and knowledgeable translation services are available; and

—“providing a knowledgeable interpreter.”

What do we find in Bill 92? None of this has been taken into account. Bill 92 will take something that used to be optional—so the different school boards, the different unions could decide to participate in central bargaining or they could decide not to participate in central bargaining. I can tell you that in the last round of negotiations, the NDP fought really hard to make sure that the French unions representing French schools within French boards had an opportunity to do the central bargaining in French. We thought we had won that battle, you see, Speaker, but then Bill 92 comes back out, and it's like none of that had ever existed. It's like all of the hundreds of years that francophones worked to gain the right to have French schools and then to gain the right to manage those schools and then to govern those schools—all of this doesn't count, all of a sudden? Well, it counts to me and it counts to anybody who cares about Franco-Ontarians in our province.

Applause.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Yes, for sure.

Everybody should understand that with a collective agreement that is written first in English and then

translated into French, whenever there is a conflict, whenever there is somebody who puts in a grievance, you will have to go back and deal with the original document. What does that mean? That means that French teachers in French schools with French unions, French directors of schools and French boards will have to work with an English collective agreement.

Why? Why would the Liberals put forward something like this? Not only is it disrespectful; we know that it's going to lead to more grievances. We know that it's going to lead to more problems on the ground because, on the ground, those collective agreements are not written to collect dust. Those collective agreements are written so that this is the way that labour and management manage the day-to-day operations. Everything that is written in those collective agreements will have meanings that have to be understood by everybody who reads them. Once you have a translated document, I'm sorry: It doesn't matter how good the translator is; you will have issues.

Why would the government put something like that forward when they already knew that this was an issue, when they had already been warned that they needed to accommodate the fact that we have francophone school boards and we have French schools in Ontario, and they have a right to have French collective agreements because this is their language of work, and this is the language that everybody speaks—except for the Liberal government, which says, “No. We’re going to have central bargaining for all of our schools. We’ll handle this little francophone issue when we have time, just not right now. Don’t bother us too much.” Can you see a little bit of disrespect in this, Mr. Speaker? I certainly can.

1550

I was giving this as one example of a bill that basically was supposed to make corrections to the previous bill, Bill 122, where everybody had agreed that, after a round of negotiations, they would go back and do changes to the legislation. One of the changes that everybody seemed to agree to is that if both parties agree, they could extend current collective agreements. That’s fine; this is contained in the bill. But pretty much everything else that is contained in the bill has not been worked through, has winners and losers. This, in bargaining, is a non-starter. Bargaining is made by human beings. We all behave at the bargaining table like human beings. That could come as a surprise to people, but this is the way it goes. You want the rules of the game to be fair, to be understood and to make sense. You do this by making sure that you take the time to talk to the different parties and find the common ground. This bill shows no effort in finding common ground. Actually, this bill goes out of its way to find things that are polarizing and that have no consensus.

I will look at one of them. It says that all education work bargaining units must participate in central bargaining following the 2017 round. Currently, collective bargaining for agreements under the act “may include

central bargaining, but is not required to include it.” So before, you could if you wanted to; now, you will have to, no matter what the French board or the French unions representing the French teachers have to say.

It goes on to say, “For the purposes of central bargaining, every school board must be represented by an employer bargaining agency and every employee in a bargaining unit must be represented by an employee bargaining agency.” Again, we know from the start that this does not work for the French unions. They represent both: They represent the teachers and they represent the support staff. Why do you put forward in a bill something that does not work on the ground before figuring things out? I thought the entire idea behind the negotiation last summer was to find common ground, but then we see things like this.

We also see things like a five-day notice being required in the event of full withdrawal of service, including instruction or lockout, in “one or more schools of a board, or the closure of one or more schools of a board.” This is in addition to the five days’ notice currently required under the act. I don’t remember anybody having consensus on that. Certainly, the people who participated in the consultation last summer did not agree and did not give the okay to such a thing.

I’m not saying that what’s in the bill is good or what’s in the bill is bad. I’m saying that if this is a bill that is going to set the stage for further collective bargaining—at this point, we are not bargaining. I’m not here to bargain. I leave this to people who know what they’re doing and have skin in the game. But if we’re going to set the rules as to how bargaining is going to take place, we should make sure that those rules are built from the ground up. We should make sure that those rules are not problematic from the start, because in French we say, “On va s’enfarger dans les fleurs du tapis.” How would we translate that in English? I’m not too sure. But it basically means, if you don’t have good ground rules, you will trip over the flowers printed on the carpet. You’re not even going to make it to the negotiations table. You will already have issues because you have a bill that is, according to the government, intent on improving and streamlining the collective bargaining process, but that in reality brings a lot of divisive issues and makes decisions on a lot of issues that are polarized, and has not been well thought through.

This is the third rendition of how collective agreements should be done in our education system. You would figure that after trial two—so everybody remembers the infamous Bill 115. Then there was Bill 122, and now there’s Bill 92 and we’re still not there. We still have a lot of issues that are not resolved that will make bargaining difficult. It is exactly the opposite of what the bill’s intention is supposed to be.

I thank you for your time. Merci beaucoup.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I’m pleased to rise and speak to Bill 92. I just want to say to the member from

Nickel Belt, I am listening very carefully to what you're saying about the francophone issues. Full disclosure, I'm married to a francophone. I try to speak French when I can here.

J'essaie de parler en français, mais j'ai besoin de plus de pratique. Je le sais.

Thank you for your comments. Your French is impeccable, by the way. I was telling the member from Durham, it's impeccable. I really enjoy listening to you speak.

In terms of this bill, Bill 92, we know that the Ontario School Boards Collective Bargaining Act came into force in 2014, and it put in place a new two-tier bargaining framework that succeeded in achieving nine central agreements with Ontario teachers and education workers. The new framework allowed us to successfully achieve nine central agreements with teachers and education workers to ensure that students continue to benefit from one of the world's best publicly funded education systems, which we can all be very proud of.

I just want to say, too, my sister is a teacher. I used to chair a school community council, so I've worked very closely with teachers. I shout out to the member from Oshawa, as well. When I was a CC chair, she was my own children's grade 8 teacher. We organized something that was very challenging, and that's called grade 8 graduation and dealing with all those parents. We say it jokingly, but we're kind of half serious that if you can organize grade 8 graduation with all the expectations of fellow parents and the students themselves, then you can do anything in the Ontario Legislature. So just a wonderful shout-out to her and to all teachers in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to add my voice today and add some comments to the debate. I appreciate the sincerity that we just heard in terms of the important demographics that can't be overlooked in any legislation that we debate in this House. I certainly appreciate the eloquent way in which she demonstrated the need to think about our French jurisdictions—very, very important.

My segue here is to say that we equally have to think about our rural jurisdictions as well, because they're getting left behind. I know that the member from Whitby-Oshawa and the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound took a lot of their time yesterday during debate on this bill to talk about the negative impact that this government is having on rural schools.

One thing that needs to be taken into consideration is performance measures and the economic impact that schools have in every community not only across my riding, but across the entire province.

1600

I can't impress enough how important it is to think of our schools, think about the language in which we should be learning and conversing as the number one priority with any decision.

I had the opportunity to be in northern Ontario a couple of weeks ago. We heard that a northern lens needs

to be laid down on all legislation that is discussed in this House. I agree with that insomuch that I totally agree that a rural Ontario lens should be placed on all legislation. Perhaps with amendments coming forward from this member, we might see a French lens put down on legislation as well.

We can't leave anyone behind in Ontario. We need action from this government, as opposed to all the inaction we've seen throughout the years.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

M. Taras Natyshak: Je vais essayer en français. J'aimerais féliciter notre collègue la députée de Nickel Belt pour son discours sur ce sujet, le projet de loi 92, en ce qui concerne les conventions collectives et les négociations syndicales.

Elle nous a parlé des problèmes qui existent directement avec le projet de loi 92 et qui concernent nos citoyens francophones. On va trouver que, certainement, ces documents, les conventions collectives, sont des documents qui sont vivants et qui ont besoin d'être très précis dans leur langage. Si nous manquons cette chance de créer un projet de loi qui adresse ce problème, il se peut que toutes les négociations futures soient mal placées.

I will go back to my first, primary language. Our colleague from Nickel Belt raises an incredibly important point here. In any future negotiations when it comes to the province and our respective French-language school boards, if that language is not absolutely precise, we risk them actually not being valid. The fact is that this potentially could even open up, I would imagine, a charter challenge in some respect in the fact that these negotiations weren't respected in the language that is carried out by the school boards.

It's one issue that I hope the government addresses in a document that is fraught with complexity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

M. Peter Z. Milczyn: C'est un plaisir de répondre au discours de la députée de Nickel Belt au sujet du projet de loi 92.

Chaque fois que nous nous engageons dans des discussions avec nos partenaires du secteur de l'éducation, c'est en vue de renforcer les progrès réalisés au sein du système d'éducation financé par les fonds publics et de continuer à offrir aux élèves la meilleure expérience d'apprentissage possible.

Chaque fois qu'une convention collective est conclue, nous nous réjouissons lorsqu'elle favorise la stabilité au sein du secteur et qu'elle crée des résultats concrets dont pourront bénéficier les élèves et les travailleuses et travailleurs de notre système d'éducation tout en respectant notre plan budgétaire.

I take note of the comments made by the member from Nickel Belt regarding the rights of French-speaking workers in a union that is essentially a French-language union, and their expectations about how they are treated in Ontario in 2017 and beyond. Those are very good

points. But there are also many other issues in Bill 92 that I want to remark on.

As a parent, I'm very pleased about the agreement that has come about around offering greater notice to parents about when labour disruption might occur. Certainly, all parents in this province would appreciate having that additional notice to put in place other plans—although I can see we've developed a new framework for collective bargaining that I am confident in the future will result in more negotiated settlements without labour disruptions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Nickel Belt for final comments.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'd like to thank the Minister of Government and Consumer Services, the member from Huron–Bruce, my colleague from Essex as well as the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for their comments. I think we can see a bit of consensus on all sides of the House that the hard-earned rights of the francophone who works in our French school for the French board to negotiate centrally in French is something that should be respected, and I thank my colleagues for that.

For the member from Huron–Bruce: I, too, represent many small communities where the schools are under review. I can tell you, I've been an MPP almost 10 years. Every year, one of the four boards—French, English, public, Catholic—will do a school review, and it always ends the same way: The little schools in Nickel Belt are closed and the kids get bused all the way to Sudbury into the big urban school.

What does that mean? Not only for those kids that are sometimes three and a half, four years old and fall asleep in the hour-and-a-half bus ride—it means that those kids are not ready to learn. They're tired; they hate school; they hate the whole thing. But for the community, after the school goes, the next one is the grocery store. Then comes the pharmacy. Then the village self-implodes because no young families will move to a community that does not have a school.

This place out in Nickel Belt: Every single year I look at Long Lake, where the school has closed, has been bulldozed over. I look at Our Lady of Fatima in Naughton, which has lost its school. Every year it's the same thing. We have the school review, and the big urban school wins and the little community loses. But really, it is all of us; it's our children and all of us who lose.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate.

Hon. Michael Coteau: It is a pleasure to stand here in the Legislature today on this beautiful day to talk about Bill 92. It gives me a lot of pleasure to talk about this bill. I'm going to take about 10 minutes to talk about this bill because I got elected back in 2003 as a school board trustee. I was young at the time. I had a sense of idealism. The world—I wanted to make it a better place. I really wanted to do that because the board, the Toronto District School Board back then, was still under supervision. When I was elected as a school board trustee, our school board was under supervision. I think it was Mr. Christie

who was the supervisor. He was appointed by the former Conservative government.

Back then, public education was in crisis. It was in crisis for so many years. In fact, if you came down to the Legislature on any given day—it could be on a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday; it didn't matter what day—this entire building was surrounded at some point. It could be in the morning, in the afternoon or in the evening. There were people down here protesting the current government. I decided I wanted to get involved in public education because of the need for change within the education system.

Back then, in 2003, when we first came into government, one out of every three young people in this province did not graduate from high school. I want you to think about that for a second. That's almost 33%. It was actually 32%. It was a 68% graduation rate at the time. Today, it's 85.5%.

Think about this: We have the Conservatives on the other side talking about fuelling the economy. We have them talking about building a better tomorrow. But when they were given an opportunity to govern our most valuable resource—our young children here in the province of Ontario—one out of three did not graduate.

So it's really interesting to sit here in this Legislature, coming from the Toronto District School Board, coming from that type of space where I saw the direct effects of a Harris government, of a Conservative government—to stand in the Legislature today to listen to the Conservatives talk about education. We're talking about Bill 92 right now, and—

1610

Mr. Steve Clark: You're not talking about Bill 92.

Hon. Michael Coteau: The member opposite from Leeds–Grenville is saying, why am I bringing this up? I'll tell you exactly why I'm bringing it up. We need to make sure that we put in place a process that allows for stability within the system. We need to make sure that we can ratify our collective agreements to ensure that we have stability here in the province of Ontario. Under the Conservative government, that stability didn't take place.

We can even go further in regard to the damage that was caused by the Conservative government, but I want to stop there and talk about the NDP for a second. Back in 2011, I was first elected into this Legislature, so it was almost six years ago that I became an MPP. I remember campaigning out there as a school board trustee, knocking on doors and talking to people. When I got to doors, I met many people who supported the NDP and we'd engage in conversation. I remember their document; it was maybe a 10- or 11-page document. It was their entire platform, if memory serves me correctly. I could be wrong, and if anyone says that I'm wrong, please correct me; I would love to know the page numbers.

Interjection: It was 14.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Sorry, 14 pages. In that document, there was no mention of public education. There was no comprehensive plan for public education, as far

as I can remember. There was no strategy from the NDP for something that takes up 25% of our expenditure here in the province of Ontario. Roughly one fourth of the expenditures of the province of Ontario we put back into public education, and the NDP didn't think it was necessary to even talk about education.

So it's pretty interesting, sitting in the Legislature today as a former school board trustee, as a former candidate for this party back in 2011, looking back at what they were able to talk about. It was absolutely nothing. That brings it back to this government and what we've been able to accomplish.

I want to go over some of the numbers, because I think it's really important for people to understand what we've been able to accomplish since 2003 to now in the province of Ontario. The accomplishments that it invests in the children and the young people in this province—as minister responsible for children and youth services, I don't think there's one member in this Legislature who would disagree with me that the best investment we could make is to make sure that our young people are set up for success for tomorrow. No one in this Legislature can say that.

Interjections.

Hon. Michael Coteau: The NDP are heckling me. How could a party that wants to govern this province—how could they stand up and not even put a piece about education in their platform, a significant plan to speak to that? How could the Conservatives stand in the Legislature today and say to us that they care, that we're making mistakes in education, that this bill does this, this and that, when they had one third of their students—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order, please. I appreciate the history lesson, but I would like to again ask the member to focus on this bill and what the member specifically had addressed, rather than reliving previous governments and so on. Thank you very much.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Mr. Speaker, thank you so much. I appreciate your advice.

This bill, Bill 92, really talks about building stability in a collective framework for Ontarians. We've been able to move forward from the dark days of the past to build a collective agreement process, a two-tier system that allows us to build off of what we did in 2014 to really build some stability so we can extend those contracts. This bill will allow us to extend those contracts to ensure that we continue to have stability.

Do you know why stability is important in this province, Mr. Speaker? Because it allows us to provide opportunity for our young people to get out there and help build the economy. It will help them get into post-secondary education. It will allow them to build lives here in the province of Ontario that we've all been afforded to build: to build a family, to be able to have—the member from Nepean said a few days ago, "All we want is to be able to pay our mortgage and to take care of our families." That's what public education does. It allows young people to have the opportunity to go into

post-secondary, into a trade—to college or university, wherever they want to go—and to build a life for themselves.

I am so proud of this government's record when it comes to public education, based on the stability we've been able to bring through the collective bargaining process here in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, I want you to listen to these numbers. This, I think, addresses the stability that I am talking about here in Ontario. Since 2003, here in the province of Ontario, this government, this Liberal government, has increased educational funding by 59%, despite declining enrolment. When I was at the board, I think we started off at 260,000 students. By the time I left, it was below 250,000 students. The numbers went down drastically, and that happened right across the province. Despite the fact there was declining enrolment in the province of Ontario, we moved public, per-pupil funding from \$4,500 to \$11,709, an increase of 63%. When the Conservatives were in power, they were making cuts to public education. When we were in power, even with declining enrolment, there was a 63% increase in educational funding per pupil.

Mr. Speaker, the most important thing—I led by talking about graduation rates, and I need to say this one more time, because this bill will bring stability into the collective bargaining process. It will create more transparency, flexibility and fairness within the system. It will allow for our students to succeed. But when we have an Ontario where one in three young people fails school, to me it's completely unacceptable. We know the Conservatives from many failures in the past. When it comes to the sell-off of the 407, that's a failure. You know what? Governments make mistakes. We saw in transit—we saw the Conservatives fill in the subway lines that we started to dig in Toronto. But you know what? It's okay. People make mistakes. Governments make mistakes.

Mr. Speaker, we saw a lack of investment in health care and education. We saw a lack of investment in infrastructure. There are certain mistakes in the province of Ontario that you could never forgive, and when one in three young people in this province don't have the opportunity to graduate high school and build a life for themselves, it is a complete failure. It is the best measurement we can use to understand if a government has done well or if it's done poorly.

There's no question in my mind that the Conservative government here in Ontario under the former Minister Eves, who became the Premier, and Mike Harris, was a complete failure when it comes to public education. I believe that this government is best positioned, through this piece of legislation, to help build an Ontario that we can all be proud of by ensuring that our young people have a fair chance to make it here in the province of Ontario by getting the right type of education and having the ability to build the type of life that they deserve.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Mr. Steve Clark: That was a very interesting speech by the Minister of Children and Youth Services. He

mentioned building stability. He said over and over again he's trying to build stability. Well, you know, I had to leave this Legislature early last Thursday and I'll be leaving again early this Thursday. I'll miss private members' business again this week. I have to go back to my riding because one of my school boards is closing seven schools in my riding.

Only in Kathleen Wynne's Ontario are we closing schools in the fastest-growing communities in eastern Ontario. Only in Kathleen Wynne's Ontario are we trying to close a school that has over 200 students, and 118 spaces of a daycare centre that gives a school board over \$50,000 a year. Only in Kathleen Wynne's Ontario do we tell a school we're going to close you when we have the money to build a new school, but a school in that same community is told something completely different, that they're going to close right away. Only in Kathleen Wynne's Ontario does a school board offer to work with the municipality in one county, but yet in another county when the same offer is put on the table, they say no.

I want to just read to you an excerpt from a letter, Speaker, that I wrote to the board chair of the Upper Canada District School Board on October 25. I only have a few seconds left, and I want to say that I believe we need to have a moratorium on rural school closures. I think we need to engage all partners and I think we need to have a respectful conversation among all stakeholders, all parties and all parents who face rural school closures. This government needs to wake up and realize that rural schools matter.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Wayne Gates: First of all, it's a pleasure to rise this afternoon after listening to both speakers. There were some things that were said here that were true. The Conservatives, under Mike Harris—make no mistake about it, he was anti-worker, he was anti-community and he was anti-union.

By the way, when you talk about school closures, which they've done for two days, it was the Harris government that brought in a funding formula that has forced the school closures. Now, the Liberals haven't fixed that, but at the end of the day, it was brought in by the Conservatives, who are now there saying it.

You talk about the NDP and our platform and all that stuff, but I'll tell you what you haven't done when you talk about kids. I have three wonderful daughters and five grandkids, and I'll tell you what Bill 115 doesn't do: Work-to-rule doesn't help kids.

Interjections.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Let me finish. Let me finish.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the Minister of Children and Youth Services on a point of order.

Hon. Michael Coteau: We're not talking about Bill 114, I think it is—Bill 115.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order, please.

I would ask that the member from Niagara Falls, when he is addressing the Legislature, address the Legislature through the Speaker, please. Thank you.

Back to the member from Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I do appreciate that. Thank you.

The reality is, this is what Bill 115—which, really, we're talking about, because he talked about it. He was talking about kids and what helps kids. Does it help kids under Bill 115 that teachers were forced to do work-to-rule, so they didn't coach our kids to play basketball? Did that help our kids? I'm just asking the minister who's over there.

When you talk about report cards, one of the most important things we can do for our children is to bring home our report cards with some comments to help Johnny or Mary or whoever it is with comments. But because of Bill 115 and because of what they were forced to do, they didn't get their comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Granville Anderson: Thank you to the Minister of Children and Youth Services, the member from Leeds-Grenville and member from Niagara Falls for their comments. I've listened to this debate over a few days, and I'll re-emphasize that we're all here, I believe, to do what's in the best interest of our children and the best interest of the school system.

I was a trustee for 11 years. I became a trustee in 2003 because of Mike Harris. I didn't like the chaos and what was happening in our school system. That was the reason why I became a trustee. I tried to serve my community as best as I could. I worked with the teachers and I worked with the students and the parents for the good of the community.

So I am here to make sure to do my best to continue to bring stability to our school system. Bill 92 does that. It tries to minimize strikes. If you ask any parent throughout this province, they want their kids to be in schools where they can learn, where they can grow and where they can become useful citizens of our province and of our country. When I speak to teachers, they don't want to go on strike. They want to be in the school; they want to work for the betterment of our kids.

When I take the GO train, I speak to parents, and one parent said to me, "Why does the NDP"—that party—"always work with unions for strikes rather than work for parents?" I've heard that over and over. We have to work together for the best interests of our kids, and we should put kids first. Unions are great, and I like to work with them, but we have to put kids first, and that's what this bill does. That's what we do as a government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I've got to tell you, I sat here and listened intently to the minister's 10 minutes or so of remarks and he barely ever spoke—the only time he ever spoke about Bill 92 was when he was admonished by

you, Speaker, to try to actually speak to the legislation. All he wanted to talk about was to be critical of a previous government.

He talks about graduation rates and how they've gone up under this government, but everybody out there knows, including the people who teach in our schools—and I know many of them—that you have weakened the curriculum to raise graduation rates, so that your government can go out and brag about graduation rates.

Then, on the other hand, the minister talks about raising the funding from somewhere under \$5,000 per pupil to over \$11,000 per pupil. He's talking about doubling the funding in our education system, and what have we gotten out of it? Do you think people are saying that we're getting better today? No, because you guys can't manage the system. You have been such a disaster in actually administering an educational system that does put children first that you have over doubled the amount of money being spent on it without improving results. The only improvements you've made in graduation rates—every objective evaluation out there will tell you that you have weakened the curriculum in order to pad your own statistics.

Shame on you, because our children are going to pay for the mistakes you have made in education. Shame on you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): We'll go back to the minister for final comments.

Hon. Michael Coteau: I just want to say thank you to all the speakers here in the Legislature today.

I got very excited—and I do get excited when I talk about public education, because for me, public education is the answer to many of the challenges people have out there in our society today. When you look around the world, and you look around North America and Canada, we see literacy levels in many jurisdictions being compromised. We see people not really embracing traditional ways of learning, literacy and numeracy. I think the best opportunity for a young person to get ahead in this world is to get a good education.

I spoke a lot about the former Conservative government. I would love it if, for once, someone on that side, on the Conservative side, would say, "You know what? You're right: 68% is unacceptable." But they have to twist it and talk about how the curriculum has been watered down and come up with these different theories—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order.

Hon. Michael Coteau: —rather than just saying, "You know what? Graduation levels of 68% are unacceptable. We do need to make changes."

You know what? Eighty-five per cent—so you're saying right now that the young people who are coming out of school, the young people who are graduating university and college, are not of the same calibre as 2003. That's what you're saying. You said that the curriculum was watered down—

Mr. John Yakabuski: No, no, objection. That's a lie.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I would ask that the member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke withdraw.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I withdraw, Speaker. I'll decide what I say, not what he says I say.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): All you need to say is "withdraw" and then sit down. I don't need any further dialogue.

As far as any other heckling goes, I would ask that if you're going to speak out, you need to be in your seat.

Your time has—

Hon. Michael Coteau: Speaker, I had 30 seconds when I was rudely interrupted.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Your time has expired. Thank you very much.

Pursuant to standing order 47(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there has been more than six and a half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader specifies otherwise.

Minister?

Hon. Chris Ballard: Mr. Speaker, we do not wish debate to continue.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Orders of the day.

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE L'AIDE MÉDICALE À MOURIR

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 22, 2017, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 84, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to medical assistance in dying / Projet de loi 84, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne l'aide médicale à mourir.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It's a pleasure, as always, to rise in this House on behalf of my riding, my constituents, my friends, and my family members back home in Essex.

Today, this debate is one that, to be honest, I wasn't completely looking forward to because it is a sensitive, difficult issue. It is sometimes heartbreaking. It is emotional. It is potentially divisive and most definitely contentious. It's Bill 84, the medical assistance in dying statute law.

1630

In preparation for the debate today, I did, obviously, some research, and I will lean heavily on the speech and the leadoff made by our health critic, the member from Nickel Belt, France Gélinas, who did a really tremendous job at highlighting some of the omissions in the bill,

some of the items that need further attention and some of the inadequacies.

At the outset, I would say that this is, obviously, a very important bill and most definitely timely for us to be debating in the House given that federal legislation brought in last year requires us to have a framework in response to the federal changes to the Criminal Code in respect to medical assistance in dying. It's one that I think is important for us to contemplate, but more so it's important for us to very, very clearly understand the will of our communities in the context of this bill.

Again, from the notes that I was able to learn from, from our colleague from Nickel Belt, we see that the government didn't really do a great job in listening to the communities and listening to health care practitioners and leaders in palliative care and end-of-life care. It's our hope that through the process of this bill the government finds a mechanism to open up the doors again to public consultation, not just simply through committee, but through transparency and accountability and communication—broad communication through whatever measure possible. Because from what we're hearing in our communities—and I'm certain that members have received letters and emails about this bill and about the issue—there is still wide disagreement and contention on both sides. It is a polarizing issue, and one that—if done correctly, the hope is that it can address the various outstanding questions that continue to exist.

Before I get there, I'd like to offer some suggestions to the government, and one that I think is born out of the need of our community to address not only end-of-life care and medical assistance in dying, but the process of health care in our communities and that continuity of care that we all hope exists from birth to death.

We know that in our communities, each and every day, people struggle to find access to long-term care and are absolutely having a terrible time accessing home care, which is a strategy put forward by the Liberal government without the adequate resources that our communities require. In fact, it was as if they threw the tag line "home care" at the wall, hoped that it stuck and hoped that private industry would fill the gap when, in fact, the way to deliver appropriate and adequate home care is with comprehensive government intervention, action and planning. What we see are large gaps in home care, long-term care and also palliative care that exist across the province.

Just look at a map of this province. It's spectacular. It's daunting. Look at northern Ontario. I mean, it's just massive in its scope. And the people that we have to remember and serve here are communities in rural Ontario that are remote and even still struggle with these issues, but yet still require the same level of service.

The challenges for our government and us as legislators is to understand that those resources have to be prioritized because it aids the overall system and it gets us to a clearer focal point on what we're talking about today: the medical assistance in dying statute law.

We know that we need to improve access to palliative care and hospice care. As I mentioned, there are many

communities that simply do not have access. In the remarks made by our colleague from Nickel Belt, she presented some stories around folks who would have to travel hundreds of kilometres to access hospice care and the fact that palliative doctors just simply do not exist to provide referrals that are embedded in the requirements of accessing medical assistance in dying. That's an enormous challenge. How in fact can we have the active mechanisms when those doctors simply don't exist? That has yet to be addressed in the bill.

We need, and frankly people in our communities deserve, improved home care. Every day in our community, in Essex, my office, our community office, receives calls from families who are struggling, many times in crisis situations, emergent health care situations that require a loved one to receive immediate long-term care and access to long-term care. The problem is, Speaker, that it simply does not exist. There are no stopgap measures.

We do know where some of those stopgap measures have been created. They are created in the wards of our emergency hospital rooms, where patients are stacked up in hallways, and emergency rooms are overcrowded, because that pathway into long-term care just simply doesn't exist.

So when we're talking about that transition and the fluidity from long-term care into hospice care and palliative care, we have to ensure that there is continuity of that care. We would impress upon the government that they have not done enough. The examples are abundant in our communities to prove that point.

We also need to support our health care professionals and make sure that they have the resources available to provide health care services, not only chronic and acute health care services but these very specialized end-of-life treatment plans and treatment protocols. I'm not exactly sure of the amount of palliative doctors that we have in the province, but I can tell you that it's finite, and I can imagine that, with an aging demographic, it's most definitely not enough. This bill doesn't do anything to ensure that we have those resources and that we are funnelling and training enough doctors to get into this field, and that they have the support from the government to be able to provide that service.

Speaker, if we look at the overall system under the Liberal government, glaring attacks and glaring hits to the system have taken place. Over 1,500 nursing positions have been cut in our local hospitals in the last two years. That's front-line care. You walk in, you get triaged and you get care. Those nurses do not exist any longer in our communities.

For four straight years, provincial health care dollars have been frozen. Those budgets for hospitals like Windsor, Leamington and across the province have been frozen. So they've had to struggle with increased levels of patients coming in and more complex needs for those hospitals with a stagnant budget. That's practically impossible to do—and all along, being mandated to not be able to run budgetary deficits through their hospitals.

How do you do that? Well, you cut back on staffing, you cut back on beds and you cut back on those essential services that we've all come to know and require in our hospitals. The effect is ultimately that people in our community suffer. That's the legacy that we have under the Liberal government.

Those issues have to be addressed within the context of any parameters of health care at the exact same time. There's no reason why they can't and there's no reason why they shouldn't.

1640

Again, this bill essentially provides Ontario with the legal framework to respond to the changes in federal legislation, the changes that were made to the Criminal Code. It has some pretty technical effects to it in that it amends six pieces of legislation to implement what is Ontario's legal framework for medical assistance in dying. It amends the Coroners Act to clarify the role of the provincial coroner. It amends the Excellent Care for All Act to ensure that the fact that a person is receiving medical assistance in dying cannot be invoked as a reason to deny or refuse a benefit that would otherwise be provided under a contract or a statute. It amends the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. It amends the Vital Statistics Act and regulation 1094 under the act, and it also amends the workplace health and safety act to ensure that workers who are covered under WSIB benefits don't lose those benefits within the process of accessing medical assistance in dying.

But again, I'll point back to what my colleague Madame Gélinas from Nickel Belt informed this House about in that this process, of course, was as a result of federal legislation coming out last year, but the unfolding of the bill and the process left a lot to be desired in terms of its consultation with the broader public and stakeholders that are directly involved in this issue.

One issue that she pointed to was that other provinces have done this and passed similar legislation to respond to the federal Criminal Code changes, but they've done it in a way that brought in community stakeholders and did incredible consultation through the mechanisms of select committees. L'assemblée nationale du Québec, which of course is the equivalent of our Legislature here in the province, started this process back in 2009, anticipating that this was a legislative change that was happening in other jurisdictions. They started the process in 2009 with consultations. They put together a select committee in the Legislature. It's something that, as New Democrats, we've asked this minister and the government to do.

The select committee travelled, as they do. They had consultations with experts in the field. They listened to best practices. They travelled abroad, Speaker. They went to France and Belgium and the Netherlands to learn about what medical assistance in dying meant there and how they addressed the contentious issues. They held 51 deliberate meetings with committee members. They consulted with 32 experts and they made 33,200 copies of their consultation paper. They listened to 273 briefs;

239 individuals and organizations were heard. They held 29 days of public hearings throughout their province, and 114 individuals were heard during the open-mike period. Some 6,558 people answered their questionnaire, and they received 16,000 comments by email, fax or online questionnaire.

Guess how much consultation the province did?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: How much?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Zero. Nothing.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Where was this?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: This is in Quebec, just the next province over. They did a really good job.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: They were the first ones.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Yes, they were the first ones. Why wouldn't we have followed that same plan of broad consultation?

To the minister—I hope you can answer this, and it's a frank question—would you not think that that type of consultation would have avoided some of the contentious aspects that still exist within the bill? I don't think you did appropriately enough. That's obviously my opinion and that of those who continue to write with questions and comments, like how are you going to address the need for doctors who have a reluctance to provide this service and issues of conscience, where they are reluctant to do that? How are you going to do that? These are issues that not only are those health care professionals asking about, but the broader public.

There would be no fault in your government to have embarked on that level of consultation, especially with something as crucial as this groundbreaking legislation in the province. You would think it would have been a given. But for whatever reason, you've left us with a bill that has not been widely consulted on.

Listen, come down to our community. Speak to the members that are interested—

Hon. Eric Hoskins: It's an invitation.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: —yes, it's a formal invitation—and maybe do a consultation, because I did not see any that existed in Windsor. If I'm wrong, let me know. But I would have been there and I certainly would have had a group of stakeholders that would have loved to have attended.

Speaker, again, the issue is one that is important for us to address. It's one that requires us to be diligent and to be transparent in the process, but one that should also compel us to look at the larger issues that exist in our health care system that bring people through this process.

When the member from Ottawa Centre spoke last week, he was eloquent in his speech and compassionate, and he invoked the compassion and the sensitivity that this issue requires. Something that stood out for me when he spoke about the bill was that end-of-life treatment should be looked at no differently than beginning-of-life treatment, and that the resources that are available and expected in our health care system should be on the same level.

I hope that this bill gets us there, but it will not if we don't address some of the outlying issues that continue to exist that exacerbate people's chronic health issues when

they're in their elderly years or if they have chronic health issues that are insurmountable. There are mechanisms for us to do that. It requires a government that prioritizes those resources and is able to make the case and to present it to us, and to infuse some more trust into the process once again. Because as we see it in our communities, when our hospitals rooms are stacked up, when people can't find access to long-term care, when home care services are fragmented and when the providers are out to simply make a profit and treat their home care workers with disrespect—they certainly are overworked and underpaid; at \$16 an hour to provide a loved one with that vital type of care, you can imagine that you're going to have a high level of turnover in your workforce.

Something that I think should be fundamental to this government—I know they'll say that this is an evolving issue and one that requires continuous effort on behalf of the government to look at, but it should be an integral part of this type of legislation and one that should be addressed by the government to ensure that communities understand that it's an overall plan, one that brings us closer to that continuity of care in our communities so that we can be assured in our final days that those resources are there and that they've been thoroughly thought out and planned for, to avoid the emotional hardship that these issues can bring upon families in our communities.

Speaker, I thank you so much for the time. I look forward to hearing from my colleagues.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Mr. Arthur Potts: I note that I am actually in my seat now, so I can make comments. I appreciate your earlier admonishment.

I'm very happy to have an opportunity to give a comment to the member from Essex on his discussions of Bill 84, medical assistance in dying. I appreciate very much the staid and balanced approach he was taking. He recognized very clearly that this is a response to federal legislation, that we have to find a way to implement those directives from the federal government—the courts, particularly—in order to get this right, that it may not be the perfect solution yet and is still somewhat a work in progress. I felt that he was taking a very non-partisan, balanced approach to this. I appreciated that until, of course, he got into some of the partisan issues that he started to drift into, but I think he pulled them back.

Particularly when he starts talking about stagnant budgets for four years in hospitals in his neighbourhood, we know that every hospital in the province of Ontario has received increased funding every year over the last four years. So I would encourage him to stick to those kinds of realities when discussing. There are more nurses being hired. They may not be all in the same institutional places where they were, but they are in the communities and there are opportunities.

1650

I particularly appreciated his comments around northern Ontarians' concerns on this legislation. If you

do have objecting physicians in the north, or primary care providers, that is, I think, part of the why the Ontario Medical Association wants there to be an effective referral, so that you can find a methodology, so that people in the north have an opportunity to access these services.

But let's be very clear about it: There's nothing more important, nothing more sacred, than the lives we live on this planet. I appreciate those who have an objection to participating, because life is sacrosanct. But it is a balancing act.

I just last week had the father of a friend of mine, who made that effort to take medical assistance in dying and died on Thursday. In order for him to be copacetic to the very end, he was off painkillers for the last three days, and it was a difficulty, something we may have to adjust in future legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I hope I have the chance, before the government shuts down debate on this bill, as they are wont to do on so many occasions, to speak to it more extensively, but I want to make one point while I have the opportunity. It is something that has been repeatedly brought to my attention and supported by the Canadian Medical Association, the College of Nurses etc., but also by a large percentage of the people in my riding, and that is the issue of conscience rights. The minister is here, and I hope that we're going to hear from him today. I hope that we can count on the minister to accept or bring forward an amendment to this bill that actually treats the issue of conscience rights and gives those people who have a genuine objection for their personal or religious beliefs the right not to participate and/or refer.

There will be ample opportunities and information, that we need to make sure that anybody who does want to participate—because the courts have ruled and the federal legislation is clear that we must have medical assistance in dying. But we do have to protect the rights of people to live by what their guidelines are and what they believe they can and cannot participate in from the point of view of either religion or their own views of right and wrong.

I think that it is incumbent on the minister—and I hope, as I stand here today, that they will bring forth some kind of amendment to respect the conscience rights of people before this bill is passed into law, as we know it's going to be. The government has the majority; the courts have certainly ruled it; the federal government has ruled it. But do the right thing. Do right by those people who have an objection based on conscience rights.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was really interesting to listen to my colleague from Essex talking about medical assistance in dying. It is a topic that is not cheerful. It is hard for most of us to talk about death, but this is what he did for the last 20 minutes. I would say that he had the

privilege to talk about medical assistance in dying, because, really, in this province very few people have had that privilege to talk about it.

Like the member from Renfrew just said, there are a lot of people that have polarized views as to what Ontario should do with this new federal legislation that makes medical assistance in dying a legal procedure covered by OHIP, available to all who decide to so end their lives and their suffering. But at the same time, we have to be very conscious of this pent-up demand to know more, to understand, to be respectful of the rights of physicians, nurse practitioners, pharmacists and everybody else in the team. All of this conversation right now takes place on social media. This is horrible, because the more this is allowed to take place on social media, the further apart everybody gets and the further polarized this issue becomes when, really, we as leaders have an opportunity, like the member from Essex did, to show that there is middle ground, that we can be respectful of all, and that if we take time and work together we can explain this legislation and we can make this legislation respectful of all of us.

I thank the member for Essex for his comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to respond to the member from Essex. I want to go back, and I did address the comments from the member from Nickel Belt. You know, we did lead, before the federal government moved on legislation, the pan-Canadian discussion on what we were going to do. We did do a meeting in Ottawa and Toronto. We did an extensive online consultation. We did opinion research.

I'll turn it back, because this is something everybody here agrees is important to all of us. So what have we done as individuals, as leaders in our community, to have this discussion? I take what the member is saying in good faith, but it's also all of our responsibility. I think that, as a government, we've moved forward in a way—this is eight months old.

I told a story last week of when I asked my mom, who is a nurse and a person of faith, "Can you participate? Could you?" She's 84. She said, "No, I don't think I could, because this is what I believe." And in the next breath, she says, "But there are extreme circumstances." What she really said is, "This is something that I have no proximity to. You're asking me a question; I don't have proximity to it. When it's front of me, that might change."

To the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, I think that what the government is doing is working very hard on a way forward to make sure that the space is there so that we all come through this together. It's not easy. It's not simple. It's something that we all care about. I appreciate the comments. I appreciate that an amendment will be coming forward. But we have to find a way to work forward that makes room for everybody so that we can come through this thing together, because it's a really critical debate in our province and in our country right now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Essex for final comments.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I want to thank the members from Beaches–East York, Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, Nickel Belt and Ottawa South.

You raised an important question, my colleague from Ottawa South. You said, "What are we doing?" Well, what can we do? Perhaps we should be holding consultations, when this bill passes, in our individual ridings. But that guidance and that leadership should be coming from the government, frankly, in whatever mechanism that the minister sees fit. It would be helpful if those signals were sent that the government was willing, ready and able, and putting in the resources to have that broader consultation with our communities prior to us having to initiate it out of our own offices. Let's all work together. Absolutely, you have our commitment to doing that, because it avoids the confusion and the contention that I think is innate in these types of discussions. But I respect and I appreciate your comments on that.

Some problems continue to exist. I think I highlighted them, but the lack of access for physicians who are even able to provide this service, especially in rural and northern communities, has to be addressed. Tell us what your plan is on that. Lack of access to palliative and end-of-life care options, including hospice services: I know that you're working diligently to move that needle forward, and I appreciate your passion on that. You've got allies here. If you need us to beat up your own government, we can do it. But you shouldn't have to, because Ontarians deserve that. We need action. It will unlock a key to what, essentially, this bill will provide—the service that will be provided. Lack of information and support for health care practitioners and the barriers that nurse practitioners continue to face regarding prescribing under the regulations of the Nursing Act—issues that can be addressed should be built into the mechanics of this bill, and I hope they see their way through amendments in the committee.

I thank the members for their attention.

1700

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'm extremely pleased to be part of this debate today. I have to say that I greatly appreciate what I'm hearing from all parties. This is an extremely challenging, sensitive and critically important subject we're debating. I sense from the discussion that we're looking at it from our various perspectives, but the intent of all my colleagues, I know, is to work towards creating a piece of legislation that is as strong and defensible as it can be and puts into place those measures not only to comply with the federal legislation, which all of the provinces and territories are responding to, but also to provide confidence to Ontarians: confidence with regard to access and confidence to those health care professionals who, for whatever reason—it might be religious beliefs; it might be an issue of conscience—decide not to participate.

We need to ensure there's an appropriate balance: that for those, with their loved ones, who might choose this path for themselves, their rights and requirements are appropriately met, and, at the same time, we respect the constitutionally protected, charter-protected rights of Canadians to also have their religious and conscience rights respected on an issue of such vital importance. So I'm pleased to add my comments this afternoon as we continue to discuss Bill 84.

I wanted to begin by taking us back to how we arrived at this place today. As we know, the legislation that I introduced late last year and that we're discussing today and we're debating would support the implementation of medical assistance in dying in this province, medical assistance in dying which is already, to varying extents, taking place across this country, including in this province.

This bill, importantly, would provide more protection and greater clarity in the implementation of medical assistance in dying for this province's patients, for their families and for our health care providers. As I'll outline a little later, the bill, as we've proposed it, we believe aligns fully with federal legislation involving medical assistance in dying. That legislation was enacted as a result of a Supreme Court of Canada decision in a case that challenged what was, at that time, a prohibition on the process and involvement of health care practitioners—or others, for that measure—in the matter of assisted dying.

I'd like to begin by providing you a little bit of background. As I think by now most of us know, the Supreme Court of Canada issued its decision on Carter v. Canada almost two years ago—in fact, slightly more than two years ago—on February 6, 2015. In the Carter decision, the court unanimously struck down the Criminal Code prohibition against physician-assisted dying for a competent adult person who clearly consents to the termination of his or her life, possesses a grievous and irremediable medical condition and is enduring suffering that is intolerable to the individual in the circumstances of his or her condition. That is the basis of the Supreme Court making the decision they did in that important decision, which of course already has had profound implications in this country.

The Supreme Court also decided to suspend its decision for a total of 16 months to allow for both federal, provincial and territorial governments and regulatory bodies, should they so choose, to begin to develop an appropriate response of their own, including potentially enacting legislation consistent with the decision, legislation similar to the legislation that we're debating today, Mr. Speaker.

During this time, our government led a process with the other provinces and territories to engage and consult with key stakeholders in the general public, with Canadians, on this complex and personal issue, and to make recommendations. In fact, it was this government and this province that took the lead in reaching out to the provinces and territories in the absence of action by the

then Harper government. The provinces and territories were concerned, because of the Supreme Court decision, that we needed to take steps of our own to canvass the population and to meet and consult with our stakeholders to begin to determine what steps, what processes, what safeguards and what confidence-building measures Ontario needed to put in place in order for us to proceed when that time came, as it has, for the implementation of medical assistance in dying.

So we did that. We created a panel of eminent persons from right across this country, including several of them from Ontario. They spent a significant period of time, as I mentioned, consulting with Canadians. We, separate from that expert panel at the time, consulted widely with Ontarians as well through a whole variety of forums. They made their recommendations, which have served us well, despite and alongside the federal activity on this issue, to help really guide us as to what legislation from the province would be most appropriate.

Following that 16-month suspension by the Supreme Court in their declaration in Carter, the federal government then went ahead and passed Bill C-14, which came into force in June of last year. That federal legislation importantly provides a consistent and national framework to support the implementation of MAID. It addresses issues of appropriateness and eligibility. It addresses the issue of access as well and the requirement to provide this service to those who request it. It also importantly addresses the issue of objection, a religious, moral or conscience objection by those health care providers. Those safeguards and those confidence-building measures, both on the patient and the provider side, are important, as I mentioned earlier, with regard to achieving that balance.

The federal legislation outlines the eligibility criteria required to obtain MAID, the medical assistance in dying. It requires procedural safeguards to be followed. It requires that a monitoring regime be established and promotes a safe and consistent approach to medical assistance in dying across the country, as I mentioned.

Now, under the federal legislation, in order to obtain medical assistance in dying, an individual must first be eligible to receive health care services funded by a provincial or territorial government, or federal government, in some instances, in Canada, and must be at least 18 years of age and capable of making important health care decisions, such as this critically important decision, on their own. They must possess a grievous and irremediable medical condition. They must have voluntarily requested medical assistance in dying, and they of course need to give their informed consent to receive medical assistance in dying.

The federal legislation went further to provide important safeguards which speak to the process which we've embraced and adopted here in this province: the requirement that two independent physicians or nurse practitioners determine a patient's eligibility, that there be a mandatory reflection period for that individual as well, and a requirement that a request for medical assistance in

dying be produced in writing in the presence of two independent witnesses.

So that, in brief, outlines both the Supreme Court decision and the accompanying federal legislation.

Before I describe the details of the proposed bill before us today and its role in light of these developments, let me provide an overview of the steps that we've already taken to support the implementation of medical assistance in dying in Ontario. These steps reflect my commitment and this government's commitment to providing Ontarians with the best possible information and assistance that they need when making decisions about their own health care. That's why my ministry implemented a number of initiatives in the months immediately following the passage of that federal piece of legislation, Bill C-14.

These initiatives that we've already implemented include information, tools and training to help patients, to assist health care providers, to assist health care facilities, to enable them all and facilitate their understanding on how to access or offer medical assistance in dying, what the federal legislation speaks to and the process that exists here in this province. We have been working closely with the province's health regulatory colleges, which regulate our physicians, nurses and pharmacists, to provide guidance on medical assistance in dying to their respective members.

1710

We've moved forward with funding the entire cost of drugs for medical assistance in dying so that they are available to Ontarians at no cost. We have launched a clinician referral service that helps clinicians locate other clinicians willing to provide or assist in the provision of medical assistance in dying. This service is used in those cases where doctors and nurse practitioners may themselves object or not be in a position to provide medical assistance in dying, perhaps on moral or religious grounds, and are looking to refer patients to willing providers. This service is also used for locating a clinician to provide a second assessment—that important second assessment that I referred to as a result of the federal legislation.

Finally, we have taken steps to ensure that information sharing and monitoring of any implementation issues take place through regular webinars with system leaders and with stakeholders, including health professional associations, sector associations, LHINs and patient groups.

With these initiatives in place, we are now proposing further steps through this legislation that, if passed, would support the implementation of medical assistance in dying in a manner that aligns with federal legislation. I should add that prior to writing this proposed legislation, we undertook wide consultations in this province, notwithstanding the consultations that I referenced earlier as a result of the national task force that Ontario co-chaired and provided a secretariat for.

About a year ago, we also had consultations with regard to the issue of medical assistance in dying and what Ontario's role appropriately might be and the

safeguards and access issues that Ontarians were looking for. We had those consultations in many, many jurisdictions, including in Sudbury twice, in both official languages; in Ottawa, again in both languages; separate consultations in Toronto, Sault Ste. Marie, Barrie, Kingston and Thunder Bay. The idea that there wasn't widespread consultation, which is ongoing until today, highly significant consultations with stakeholders, health care professionals, the associations that represent them, patient groups and advocates—all those parties that necessarily need to play a role as we find our way delicately, but through consensus, to reach that point where, again, we reach that balance of access to patients, to medical assistance in dying, but also understanding that we have an obligation to put safeguards in place for those health care professionals who choose not to participate.

The proposed legislation, which introduces amendments to a number of provincial acts, remains necessary because we have to and believe that we should provide further support and protection to both providers and patients. Although admittedly the federal legislation is highly comprehensive and contains important safeguards, some of which I referred to earlier, there are some issues that it does not address since they fall under provincial jurisdiction.

That's why I am pleased to speak today about Bill 84—not simply to speak, as I will, about the amendments and the changes that are proposed in the proposed legislation, but to provide that background and that context and to give confidence to Ontarians that there is a process that has been undertaken for a number of years now where we have generated so much information and good advice from the entire cross-section of society on this issue, from Ontarians themselves and from those who enjoy that privilege of being front-line workers within our health care sector.

Speaker, our government introduced this legislation in keeping with the Supreme Court's decision, and in doing this, it's important that we provide clarity and direction for clinicians and patients navigating medical assistance in dying and also ensure that there is appropriate oversight for medical-assistance-in-dying deaths in this province. The bill, for this reason, contains a narrow series of amendments to existing legislation, including amendments to the Excellent Care for All Act, which, if passed, would include the following two provisions: First, medical assistance in dying would not affect a right or a benefit that would otherwise exist under a contract or a statute, whether it be life insurance or survivor benefits; and second, physicians, nurse practitioners and persons assisting in the lawful provision of medical assistance in dying would have immunity from civil liability.

Amendments to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act would ensure that any claims under the act would be determined based on the illness or disease for which the worker was determined to be eligible to receive medical assistance in dying.

An amendment to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Municipal Freedom of

Information and Protection of Privacy Act would, if passed, protect clinicians and facilities willing to provide medical assistance in dying from being identified under access-to-information laws and requests.

Further, Mr. Speaker, an amendment to the Coroners Act would, if passed, ensure effective monitoring of medical assistance in dying by requiring the coroner in the first instance to be notified of all medical-assistance-in-dying deaths, clarifying that the existing requirement under the Coroners Act to investigate any death from any cause other than disease does not apply to medical assistance in dying, clarifying when the coroner is required to complete death certificates for medical-assistance-in-dying deaths, and requiring a review of that coroner's oversight role. The Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services would establish this review process within two years of passage of the bill.

Finally, there would be an amendment to the Vital Statistics Act. It would clarify requirements respecting the coroner's documentation of medical-assistance-in-dying deaths and make that consistent with the proposed Coroners Act amendments.

Mr. Speaker, we realize that end-of-life care is an important and complex issue, and although medical assistance in dying is only one piece of our government's plan to provide compassionate and effective high-quality care to those requiring end-of-life support, it is an important one. Our government will continue to invest in hospice and palliative care and long-term care to promote greater and full choice for Ontarians who are approaching the end of their life. With any choice an Ontarian makes, whether that be hospice care, palliative care or medical assistance in dying, our government is committed to a respectful, patient-centred approach that truly supports patient choice.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm pleased to ask the minister a couple of questions; maybe one question and some comments. On Friday, when I was back in my riding, I met with Dr. Phil Drijber. He came to my constituency office. I actually share him as a constituent with the member for Haldimand–Norfolk. It was a great opportunity to get the perspective of a practising physician about the importance of conscience protection and the concerns of medical professionals with this government's MAID legislation. He spoke to me about how conscience rights are protected in other provinces, including Alberta's self-refer model.

One of the things that he said to me was very telling, and I want to repeat the quote that he gave me in my office when we were deliberating on Bill 84: "No one wins when the rights of someone else are trampled on to get my rights." In other words, we have to find a balance with the legislation. I think other provinces have demonstrated it can be done, that we can respect patients and medical professionals.

1720

I appreciate the very respectful tone that members have presented in the debate previously when I was in the

House last Tuesday and today. During that debate last week, I asked the member for Ottawa South a direct question during my questions and comments after his leadoff: Will the government support an amendment to protect conscience rights? In his response, the member said, "We have to find a way to balance all those rights." That was the member's quote. I think that's great, but we're hearing that finding that balance will require an amendment. So, again, I want to ask the government—I asked the parliamentary assistant last week and I'm going to ask the minister this week—will the government support it when it's brought forward at committee? Will you support an amendment that deals with conscience rights?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Indeed, it is an honour to stand and represent my constituents in Windsor–Tecumseh and to make comments on the minister's thoughts on the medical-assistance-in-dying bill. The minister called it "an extremely challenging" bill. It's a "sensitive and critical" piece of legislation which is needed to bring Ontarian into compliance with the Supreme Court's decision and the subsequent federal legislation.

We had a situation in Windsor not long ago—and the minister spoke about the need to recognize those with a religious or moral conviction who are opposed to this legislation on medical assistance in dying—where a patient at a religious hospital wanted to take this step and wanted to be transferred. Because they wouldn't do it in the religious hospital, he wanted to be transferred to one of the other hospitals in Windsor. Of course, they refused to take him because he wasn't their patient and they didn't want to bring him in just for that purpose. So the suggestion was that perhaps he'd have to go to London or some other part of Ontario. So that is something that we have to take into account when we deal with medical assistance in dying.

In Windsor, the issue goes back to 1996, where we had a 53-year-old tool-and-die maker, Austin Bastable, who went over to Detroit to see Dr. Jack Kevorkian. His life ended in the home of a woman, the local president of the Hemlock Society, where Jack Kevorkian passed him a gas mask and a cylinder of carbon monoxide. His life ended in Detroit because he couldn't do it in Canada. We're finally, from 1996 to now, getting to this stage of discussion on this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I want to thank my colleague the Minister of Health for his thoughtfulness and his leadership on this and my colleagues in the Legislature for their thoughtful discussion.

This is very personal to me. I just wanted to get a few comments on the record about a perspective that I think is important. When I turned 20 years old, AIDS was not a word in the English language. When I had my 30th birthday, I went to a funeral for my 43rd friend who had died of AIDS—all in their twenties; I've held more

people in that decade in my life than most have—in my arms.

There were not government supports. The health minister of the day federally, a Conservative, said that AIDS was a moral issue and not a health issue, and there was no funding. We volunteered. It was my part-time job. I worked every night, cooking meals and providing support. Families rejected people. There was no same-sex marriage. People would come in—families, distant relatives—and take all the possessions out of people's homes, leaving the surviving spouse bereft of any memory or money.

I do remember the first person that I counselled who got a positive test and then went on to get very sick, who wanted to end his life many times. I remember sitting with him on a sofa while he cried. He had cytomegalovirus virus. He was so desperately ill—of diseases whose course of action and outcome were not even understood. But almost everyone who got this disease at that time died a very difficult death from horrible illnesses—

Interjection.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: —which the member from Nepean—Carleton seems to think is funny.

I could not explain to him why he shouldn't be able to die. He is now almost my age, healthy and doing well—at a time when it seemed hopeless.

So I hope the focus of this isn't on the doctors, who have so many protections, but on actually having the spiritual, emotional and whole conversation and creating choices, because we're not talking enough in this debate, in my mind, about the people who are confronted with impossible choices and impossible conditions. I hope we have some more time to discuss that, because while I support the legislation, I have deep concerns.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions or comments?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this again. I appreciate the minister's remarks today.

I support precisely what my colleague from Leeds—Grenville was speaking about—which I talked about earlier when I had two minutes—conscience rights and how we have to find the balance. As he pointed out, other provinces have found a way to enshrine that, to protect the charter rights of those who don't feel that they should be forced to participate.

I want to talk about an article I read on the weekend in the National Post—I believe it was the National Post: “Take My Name Off the List, I Can't Do Any More”: Some Doctors Backing Out of Assisted Death.” We understand how emotional and sensitive and difficult this topic is. This story is about doctors who have participated in a medically assisted death and who now are saying, “I'm sorry, I can't do this anymore”—for various reasons, emotional or otherwise, or even fear of prosecution if something went wrong. This speaks to just how important one's own feelings are in this debate and how important one's own feelings and beliefs are in this process and this procedure.

We understand that the courts have ruled and we have to have legislation in place. We need to have legislation that accompanies the change at the federal level. But I think we will be making a huge mistake if we do not entrench the conscience rights to protect—everybody has charter rights. We have the right not to be discriminated on the basis of religion, and if someone's religion, in their view and in their interpretation, prohibits them from participating in this, then they should not be forced to do so.

I do ask the minister once again, please support an amendment that entrenches conscience rights into Bill 84.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the Minister of Health for final comments.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I want to thank the members from Leeds—Grenville, Windsor—Tecumseh, Toronto Centre and Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke for their comments.

A general comment: This is not easy. This is a pathway—a societal path—in health care that we have not been down before. It makes it extraordinarily challenging, but it makes it even more important that we get it right.

It is true that 80% of Ontarians support medical assistance in dying. I'm a health care professional myself, and it is true that this is not only a professional decision by a physician or nurse practitioner, it's also a deeply personal decision for that individual, and I respect that. I respect the fact the federal government has very directly and specifically referenced those charter rights and those conscience rights.

We need to get that balance right. We need to make sure we have a system of medical assistance in dying which sits alongside the other end-of-life care and supports that we are putting in place, whether that's palliative care, hospice care or other supports to caregivers. We need to make sure that this is an option that society has confidence in, that balances those rights—the rights of patients to access a legally available service in this country—and at the same time respects all of our charter rights, including those of the health care professionals we're asking to play such an important role as we, from a societal perspective, move further and further towards an important decision that many individuals in this province will necessarily have to contemplate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

1730

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's my pleasure to rise in debate today for Bill 84, the Medical Assistance in Dying Statute Law Amendment Act.

Before I start, I do have some good news I would like to share with the assembly. As many of you know, I put forward a private member's motion last fall for a compassionate and catastrophic care fund for the province of Ontario. Earlier today, there were many people here from CORD Canada fighting for rare diseases, but it wasn't just for rare diseases; it was also for exceptional circumstances in health care.

One of the big champions of that private member's motion was a mayor from Trent Hills named Hector Macmillan. Mayor Hec had to travel to Germany to get life-saving surgery. The OHIP panel here in Ontario was giving him a very difficult ride, but he did nevertheless fundraise for those initiatives and for that surgery. He went to Germany and, just an hour ago, contacted me to say that he has no cancer left in his body.

Medical advances, of course, are everywhere. I want to congratulate Mayor Hec not only for being cancer-free, but for being a fighter. If it were not for his work, the government would not be, I don't think, exploring the possibility of bringing the NanoKnife to the province of Ontario. Unfortunately, he wasn't able to use it here, but he will hopefully save other lives.

That brings me to this particular bill, Bill 84. It has been stated many times in this assembly that—

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Pardon me?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order, please.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: You know, you can't share good news around here, Speaker, without Liberals wanting to take credit for it.

The reality here is that this is effectively a process piece of legislation—

Interjections.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Speaker, the reality is that the Liberals are over there—you can't even agree with them and they have to heckle you. You can't even suggest that you're supporting a bill of their own, and you can't even share good news in here without them playing these stupid games. I watched it in question period this morning; I'm watching it again on the floor of this assembly. They should be better than that. We're really getting tired of it. Again, you can't agree with them without getting heckled. Maybe they don't have much to do, and this is what the backbenches over here are relying on—for the future government of Ontario to stand up and then get heckled by them.

Nevertheless, let's get back to Bill 84, for the first time in the last three minutes, and talk about this—hopefully without any heckling from the other side, so that I may be able to complete my thoughts.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: But you can heckle. You can heckle.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Here we go, Speaker. Seriously.

In all seriousness, we have declared support for this resolution, and I'll tell you why, Speaker. The bill is here to provide clarity and legal protections for health care professionals and organizations that provide access to what's called MAID services in Ontario, in accordance with federal legislation, Bill C-14.

I think it's important for us to note at this particular time that this legislation isn't about whether you support assisted dying or you don't. That decision was made by the federal government and, in particular, by the Supreme Court of Canada a few years ago. What we're actually doing now, in the words of our critic, Jeff Yurek, is just

providing clarity. We're cleaning up some of the loose strings that were left with the federal legislation, as well as the decision by the Supreme Court of Canada.

In accordance with that ruling, the federal government did pass legislation on June 17 related to medical assistance in dying. As a result, we now have regulatory health professional colleges that will provide guidance and regulations regarding medical assistance in dying. This is a specific issue for a specific problem that was created as a result of legislation. We're providing clarity. This happens all the time, and it's why we're dealing with it.

One of the things that we hear time and again—and I do have a letter in my desk from one of my constituents—is the concern of those who believe that medically assisted dying should be accessible for those who qualify and want it without forcing institutions and health care practitioners to act against their beliefs. That's a consistent piece of concern. Whether I agree with it or not is totally irrelevant. I think the reality is that when you look at health care professionals and practitioners, they are actually asking for this, as are many patients.

Ontario's regulations, in our opinion, must ensure a balance between individual rights, including recognizing the conscience rights of health care practitioners and facilities, while also protecting vulnerable individuals. We believe there is a path forward, as other provinces have done—notably, I would like to point out, Alberta—to ensure that our health care system respects all perspectives on this issue. It is an issue of personal morality, and that is something that is very difficult to legislate. We respect the conscience rights of professionals.

Just to point it out, back in February 2015, to give you a sense of the history of this, the Supreme Court of Canada struck down the Criminal Code that would prohibit those seeking assisted dying. The court determined a competent adult, like you or myself, who would consent to end their life through what would be apparently a terminal medical condition would be allowable.

I know this had a robust conversation and debate in the federal House. In fact, I remember at the time, very courageously, the former MP and cabinet minister from Manitoba, who is now a sitting member of the Legislature in Manitoba, Steven Fletcher, talking about his views in a personal way after an accident that he had sustained that made him a quadriplegic. Many of us in this assembly probably do have very personal views. I say this as someone who has lost her father and watched him suffer. I don't know if this would have been something he would have chosen to do in the ending days of his life, but I do know that we, in our family, really relied on the palliative care system in Nova Scotia.

If I may say so, as we talk about dying with dignity and dying feeling like you have some control left in your life, the palliative care in that province was quite remarkable. In fact, I would then, after coming back from my father's funeral, decide that I wanted to get to know a little bit more about Ontario's palliative care system. This

was a decade ago; I was elected 11 years ago. I can say, Speaker, through you, that we do have a remarkable health care system for those in palliative need and hospice care in the dying days. It is in no small part due not to government funding, but due to the people who have the most incredible bedside manner, whether that is a palliative care nurse or palliative care doctor or other people who work in those units.

I saw it with my own father. Those who choose to spend their career caring for the terminal are indeed angels on earth. So too are the palliative care nurses, doctors, orderlies and those people who are at places like Bruyère or Ruddy-Shenkman or anywhere else in the province. My heart goes out to them because they are very strong and angelic at the same time.

Not every family, given the new assisted dying legislation, will choose to continue with palliative care if they can choose to terminate their life and die by assisted suicide. That brings a number of different conundrums into play. It's very important that not only are our patients given the appropriate pain medication, the appropriate relief and the appropriate care, but it's also important that we consider the needs of our health care professionals in the province of Ontario.

I know that there are some who do object to providing this type of assistance in order to terminate a life. The Progressive Conservative caucus feels that there needs to be a process in place in order to protect those people. That's why our critic, Jeff Yurek, will be making an amendment that would protect those rights, but allow those who are seeking to die by assisted suicide to pursue that.

One of the biggest champions on assisted dying was Dr. Don Low. He died of a brain tumour, and many people may remember Don Low from his advocacy for assisted dying. He made national headlines on this issue as he died. His wife, Maureen Taylor, spoke to our parliamentary committee. She was also the co-chair of the Provincial-Territorial Expert Advisory Group on Physician-Assisted Dying that was set up by our government. He at the time gave an emotional plea on YouTube.

1740

Sorry. Maureen Taylor was Don's—okay, I've got this a little bit wrong. I'm just actually going to get this right. Maureen Taylor spoke at the committee, and was the co-chair of the provincial-territorial expert committee group. It was her husband, Don, who passed away from a brain tumour. It was he who gave the emotional plea.

I want to quote what she said at committee, because I think for a woman who has gone through what she's gone through to appear at committee was quite remarkable, but also to have such a balanced view I think is appropriate for us to discuss in the House. She said, "I want to stress, too, that I totally support the rights of individual health care practitioners not to participate in assisted death if that goes against their conscience."

I think it speaks to the balance that we're looking for on this side of the House that, even though there are

strong advocates across the province of Ontario for medical assistance in dying, there are also strong advocates within that area who support the conscience rights of Ontarians who may be involved in health care. That's why I think it's important that when we reach out and we speak to organizations like the Canadian Medical Association, who has a policy to support those who provide medical assistance in dying and also those who do not—apparently, from my research, they have advised the College of Physicians and Surgeons to revise their effective-referral approach. The College of Nurses of Ontario also calls for medical assistance in dying to allow nurse practitioners and physicians to administer medications to cause the death of a client.

There is a great deal of research out there, particularly by many of the big stakeholders. The Canadian Medical Association's policy is to support those who will choose to participate in MAID, medical assistance in dying, and those who will not. I think that their position articulates a duty that is widely and morally acceptable, and that allows physicians to act as moral agents without in any way impeding or delaying patient access to assisted dying. They support freedom of conscience.

I think I heard from the minister today that he was pleased not only to receive the support of most members of this assembly, but also that he recognizes that this is a consistent and recurring theme in many of the discussions that we have had. It is always about a fair and balanced approach, particularly as we talk about morality and what people are comfortable with, with their own conscience.

The Canadian Medical Association further states that the CPSO's effective-referral approach is encouraged to support the creation of systems and resources that would facilitate access to those seeking MAID services.

I just mentioned the College of Nurses. They also recognize a nurse's freedom of conscience. We were fortunate here last week to have the RNAO here talking about some of the challenges in our health care system and what they view in terms of moving forward. I didn't have the opportunity to speak to them about Bill 84, but we did have a long-ranging, far-reaching discussion on some of the challenges that are faced today in our health care system. It just goes to show you how complex this actually is.

The College of Nurses of Ontario would probably point out that the legislation doesn't compel an individual to provide or assist in MAID, but the nurse's conscience objection must not be directly conveyed to the client, and their personal judgments regarding belief, lifestyle or identity are not to be expressed to the client. I would agree with that. I think that if my personal choice were to be to choose to die by medically assisted suicide, I would want to have people around me who would support that decision, if they were trained professionals. Those who had those strong feelings perhaps shouldn't convey those to the patient, in which case that would make for, I think, a great deal of trauma for the patient. We all have different views, and we all have different ideas. We all

have different expectations of life and death. I, for one, wouldn't want to tell anybody how to live or to die. That's obviously a choice that the Supreme Court of Canada allows us.

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario effectively talks about this effective referral. I just want to point out—this has come out a number of the times in this assembly over the last 11 years on a variety of different topics within the medical system, but effective referral basically ensures that a patient is connected in a timely manner to another physician who is not objecting. That would provide accessibility to the patient. An effective referral doesn't guarantee that a patient will receive treatment, but it does ensure access to care and demonstrates respect for patients.

HealthCARE, which is an organization that agrees with the bill but is seeking an amendment for conscience rights, proposed something at the committee.

The OMA supports a patient referral option in addition to clinician referral services. The OMA doesn't support CPSO's effective-referral policy.

The Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario didn't propose amendments, but their principal concern remains how MAID will impact the quality and funding of Ontario palliative care services.

As I just spoke about, I think it's incredibly important that as we have this debate and we talk about medically assisted dying—I probably have the terminology wrong, Speaker, because I think it probably evolves to be a bit more sensitive than it started out with. I want to say that as much as I respect those choices, I also respect those choices for people who want to die naturally but with the support of a palliative-care hospice unit.

It's one of those things. Again, I know for a fact that palliative care, particularly in a terminal patient, won't save someone's life. As much as I had hoped when my dad was getting chemotherapy, it was palliative chemo. It wasn't shrinking his tumour; it was maintaining at least some semblance of life for him, particularly in the last six weeks of his life. He stayed with us until he couldn't.

It is an option that we use as family members and as people, after we've exhausted all of our options, in order to keep our loved one with us as long as we possibly can. I certainly respect the Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario.

This effectively sums up Bill 84, on medical assistance in dying. It ought not to be controversial, because, again, we are prescribed by the Supreme Court of Canada to accommodate this. Therefore, as we do that and we tie up those loose ends that have been left to us by the federal government and the Supreme Court of Canada, we have to have that discussion about those people who are either comfortable or not in performing this activity.

I think that there needs to be that sensitivity, and I believe in my heart that when we put forward our amendment, the government will beat us to it and they will respect what so many of their stakeholders are saying, what their expert Dr. Don Low's wife had said—I want to get her name out there one more time, because I think it's rather important. Her name is Maureen Taylor.

I think that when you look at that, we can strike a balance that allows us to meet our statutory obligations, while at the same time understanding that there needs to be a balance for the conscience of the people of this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm pleased to rise on Bill 84. I want to start by saying to the health minister, who has stayed with us all afternoon—I think that's very important, when you're having something as important as this, to have the minister take the time out of their schedule to sit and listen to both parties and where they're coming from. So I want to say thanks for being here this afternoon.

I was also a little surprised at some of the figures that came out this afternoon—that 80% of people in Ontario support assisted dying, but the reality is that 20% do not. It is a personal decision—what you're going to do, how you're going to end your life—but I'm going to tell a story, because I think it may be how a lot of people feel, certainly the 20% that aren't sure whether they agree with assisted dying or not.

My father-in-law passed away in June. Mr. DeLuca was a wonderful guy. I loved him to death. He passed away over the course of a weekend. On Friday, he was watching a Blue Jays game—he was a big Blue Jays fan, like a lot of us are—then he had some problems, and he never woke up again. He never woke up on Saturday. He never woke up on Sunday, never woke up again on Monday. As the family got together, the hardest part was that they didn't have a chance to say goodbye. To this day—well, it's seven or eight months now—Rita, my wife, still says to me, "I wish I had one more day with my dad."

1750

I think that's why this issue is going to be so tough for some families. We didn't have a chance to say goodbye to Mr. DeLuca in the way we wanted to. The doctor didn't know this was going to happen, didn't know that he was never going to wake up again. It's the one thing that I think I have to consider when I'm thinking of assisted dying. I want to make sure that when I decide to go, I have the opportunity to tell everybody how much I love them. It's part of that dialogue and discussion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to respond to the member from Nepean–Carleton. I do want to say a few words again about balance. It is critical that we strike a balance in this bill. We do have to find a way to protect both of those rights. I'm not sure that inserting both of them in the bill will achieve that. There's a way forward, I believe, but what's most important is that this debate, whatever side you're on, brings forward a couple of critical questions, most of which are personal.

The member from Niagara Falls just alluded to his own personal experience. Part of the difficult but wonderful thing in this debate is that people are sharing

their experiences and their thoughts on something very important, which is the end of life.

What that speaks to is what we have to do as individuals for those people we love, who are going to make decisions for us. We have to let them know what's important. We have to let them know what we want. We have to prepare. Medical assistance in dying has brought up death as an issue that can get discussed more openly.

I told the story about some of my own discussions with my mom—I won't go back into it again—around advanced care planning and what her wishes were. The interesting thing about those conversations is that they are ongoing. It's not a static conversation. There are frameworks to do it, but it's really about what's important to you and what your wishes are.

What is important in death is generally the same things that are really important in life; it's just that we often confuse the immediate with the important. So I want to thank the member very much for her comments, and over to you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further comments and questions?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm very appreciative of the opportunity to speak to this particular bill and share comments on the presentation that we heard from our colleague from Nepean–Carleton, because she set the right tone. This is a very serious conversation that we need to have.

I'd like to let everyone in this House know that Ontarians, as well as residents throughout Huron and Bruce, are highly interested in this particular debate and this particular piece of legislation. I've had numerous people reach out and contact me in support of their doctors' rights, saying that our doctors should have an opportunity to have a conscientedecision in what they choose to do, and I thank them all for reaching out to my riding constituency office in that regard.

I want to segue over to the fact that we're listening and we get it. I want to assure residents in Huron–Bruce and across Ontario that we get it. Our colleague from Elgin–Middlesex–London, our health critic, has done a phenomenal job in authentic consultations, getting to the heart of the matter. Because of that, I think he has come forward with a very thoughtful amendment that I truly hope this Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care will consider seriously, because I believe that no other jurisdiction in the world with access to medical assistance for death penalizes a doctor for invoking their conscience rights. As this bill is currently written, there are no provisions for a medical practitioner to recuse himself from offering medical assistance in dying on the grounds of personal beliefs. We have to stand by Ontarians.

As our health critic pointed out in his opening remarks last week, the PC Party of Ontario is looking to bring forth an amendment to secure that right for them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I'll add a couple of points. First, a follow-up to the member from Niagara Falls who

mentioned that the health minister has joined us this afternoon. His parliamentary assistant, from Ottawa South, Mr. Fraser, has been here all afternoon as well. I think that shows their interest in this legislation.

The member from Nepean–Carleton talked about my friend Maureen Taylor, who was very instrumental on this issue. She was married to Dr. Donald Low, who was the face of the SARS epidemic in Toronto. Dr. Low passed away, I think, in September 2013 from a brain tumour and left a very passionate video on his deathbed, crying out for legislation on medical assistance in dying. As you may know, Speaker, Maureen Taylor grew up in Tilbury. Some of her family still live in the area. Maureen was a reporter with CBC Windsor for many years. We became very good friends. The member from Essex and the member from Windsor West and I were at a huge fundraising gala in Windsor last weekend for autism, and Maureen's brother-in-law, a labour lawyer, Jim Renaud, was there as well. So my roots with Maureen Taylor go back a very long way.

This bill is very much needed. It's overdue. It needs support from all sides of the House. It is very sensitive but there's no denying it has to get done—no denying that—because we have to comply with the federal legislation and have to comply with the Supreme Court of Canada. We have to get together and make this happen because this is something—we have to be sensitive; we have to look out for those who don't agree with it. But, Speaker, we just have to get together and make it happen, and I'm glad we are working towards that this afternoon. Thank you for your time, sir.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Nepean–Carleton for final comments.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Again, this is a sensitive debate, one that I believe everyone in the House has decided to attach a degree of sentimentality to, ensuring that not only are we doing the right thing on behalf of our patients but that we are also considering the medical professionals within our health care system. I appreciate all members bringing light of that to the floor, and I of course appreciate my colleague from Windsor West who talked about his friends, who I didn't know he was familiar with and had a friendship with. It was wonderful that you brought that to the floor of the assembly.

Speaker, again on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus, this piece of legislation, Bill 84, will have our support. We are asking for a motion, and I suspect that the government may even put in their own motion, in order to address some of the concerns that are being considered on the floor of this assembly. Again, I want to thank all members for their contribution to this debate and, just to reiterate, we are left here with Bill 84 as a result of dealing with federal government legislation due to a decision by the Supreme Court of Canada. Sometimes it is our job not to debate the morality of what the federal Parliament does or what the Supreme Court of Canada does, but we must implement what they expect us to do and that is our role as legislators. That is what we have done here today.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

ELECTRIC VEHICLES

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member for Leeds-Grenville has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given today by the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter and the member from Beaches-East York, the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, may reply for up to five minutes. I now turn this over to the member from Leeds-Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you very much, Speaker. I have to tell you, it's with a bit of frustration that I asked for a late show on this matter. I think most members who are in the House right now have heard me ask the question a number of times. I want to again reiterate that I would like some clarity. It was actually the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change that, on February 1, 2017, at 2 p.m.—it's very precise in this release—announced changes, or what they called at the time “enhancements,” to the Electric Vehicle Incentive Program.

1800

I brought this up in the House last week, as well, from a story that Shawn Jeffords from the Sun wrote in the paper which I'm holding. This is the Friday, February 24, 2017, Toronto Sun. It indicates that the minister's office later, after question period, released a summary of the Integrity Commissioner's advice to Mr. Myrans, who I understand was the former chief of staff to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. It just seems pretty strange. I think I used the phrase that it doesn't appear to pass the smell test that this ministry issues these changes to the program, which essentially deal with one company, Tesla, and the chief of staff—former chief of staff now—to Minister Murray now works at Tesla.

I guess the very first thing I would like the parliamentary assistant to acknowledge is that I would like to have the documents that were sent to Mr. Jeffords from the Sun sent to me as well. I think they should make them public. They should allow them to be part of the public record. If it's good enough to send to Mr. Jeffords, I hope it will be sent to me as well.

The second thing is that because of the evasive answers that the ministers have given me in this House, both the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change and also the Minister of Transportation, I actually filed an order paper question, which I'll read into the record—with your indulgence, Speaker. It's order paper question number 229:

“Mr. Clark—Inquiry of the Ministry—Would the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change provide all emails sent by his former staff Iain Myrans that

contain the word ‘Tesla’ from September 1, 2014 to February 1, 2017.”

That was filed on February 27. The reason I did that was that this government brags about them being—I think they use sometimes the words, “We're the most open and transparent government.” I certainly don't believe that, and I don't think anybody in Ontario actually believes that. Why should I go through freedom of information? If Kathleen Wynne wants to have an open and transparent government, when a member asks this very specific question which would shed light on this situation, I would ask them to do it. So that's the second thing that I want the minister's representative, the member from Beaches-East York, to address.

Then, the final thing: I received a letter today, which I'll read into the record, from the Integrity Commissioner, the Honourable J. David Wake. I'll just paraphrase first. He thanks me for my letter concerning Mr. Myrans regarding the possible breach of part II of Ontario regulation 382/07, “Conflict of Interest Rules for Public Servants (Ministers' Offices) and Former Public Servants (Ministers' Offices).”

I'll read you this quote: “Pursuant to section 69(4) of the Public Service of Ontario Act, 2007 (PSOA), I can make appropriate inquiries if I have concerns that a conflict-of-interest rule has been contravened by a former public servant that worked in a minister's office. However, you should be aware that pursuant to section 69(7) of the PSOA, if I elect to make such inquiries regarding Mr. Myrans, I am limited simply to notifying the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change regarding any determinations or directions made with respect to the matter. I have no legal authority to release that information publicly. The decision to do so would be the minister's.”

That is the quote from the Integrity Commissioner. So my third question is, will the minister's office—will you, sir, the parliamentary assistant—guarantee me that the minister will release this information from the Integrity Commissioner and will you make it public?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. The parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change now has up to five minutes to respond.

Mr. Arthur Potts: I'm delighted to respond to the member from Leeds-Grenville, on behalf of the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change as his parliamentary assistant.

Speaker, we know that over a third of the emissions that are released in this province are caused in the transportation sector. That is why our government is taking very proactive measures to tackle the amount of pollutants, carbon particularly, that is caused by that sector. Having more electric vehicles on our roads will not only help Ontarians save on fuel costs, but it will also cut the amount of greenhouse gases that we produce.

The decision regarding the Electric Vehicle Incentive Program, which has been referenced by the member

opposite, was made in mid-2016, and it came into effect on January 1, 2017. While this was a government decision—

Mr. Steve Clark: You made enhancements on February 1.

Mr. Arthur Potts: On January 1; it's my understanding that the program actually came into effect on January 1. The news release may have gone out later, but the program came into effect on January 1.

While this was a government decision, it's important to note that the program is completely administered by the Ministry of Transportation. They take the lead on this program, the Electric Vehicle Incentive Program, while the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change is the lead in the Electric and Hydrogen Vehicle Advancement Partnership, or EHVAP.

With respect to the member's question on departing staff members, all staff members are aware of their obligations under the conflict-of-interest regulation. The Office of the Integrity Commissioner provided written advice to the staff member in question, and the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, as you noted, was copied on that letter. In that written advice, the Integrity Commissioner determined that it was permissible for him to accept the new offer of employment. The Integrity Commissioner has laid out post-service obligations and restrictions to the previous employee that will apply in his new employment, including what's required under the act: a 12-month restriction on lobbying. The staff member has complied with the advice and the guidance of the Integrity Commissioner.

Given that he's followed all of the appropriate rules, it's really unfortunate that the members opposite, the PCs, are disparaging someone who is now a private citizen in an attempt to try to score cheap political points. They're asking the Integrity Commissioner, effectively, to look into a matter that he's already signed off on. We should instead be talking about our plans to fight climate change, to reduce the fossil fuels that are being emitted into the environment. Our action plan will invest in pro-

jects that will fight climate change, like transit, electric vehicle incentives and housing retrofits—all great programs fully supported by the people of Ontario.

There will be absolutely zero funding for green projects and zero funding to manage a transition to a low-carbon economy in the plan that has been half-articulated by the members opposite. According to third-party economic experts, our plan will achieve the highest amount of emissions reductions at the lowest cost. Modelling by economic experts shows that the PC approach will cost families and businesses more, with no guarantees of emissions reductions.

The Electric and Hydrogen Vehicle Advancement Partnership is the MOECC's component, which brings together the automotive sector, advocacy organizations, academia and government to increase the number of non-polluting vehicles on Ontario's roads. We know, as I've said earlier, that transportation is contributing about 35% of Ontario's emissions, so it's an extremely important sector to get right. Knowing this, our government has rolled out programs to mitigate the amount of emissions that are released by vehicles.

Our partnership will allow participants to work together on initiatives to help Ontarians save money and lower their carbon footprints. By 2020, we aim to have 5% of cars on Ontario roads to be either electric or hydrogen powered, and this voluntary partnership, coupled with the Electric Vehicle Incentive Program, will help us achieve this goal.

Speaker, let me just say that our kids are counting on it. That's all I have to add.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order, please.

I'd like to thank both members for their participation in this deemed late show.

It is now time. This House stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock.

The House adjourned at 1809.

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